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ARGOSY

MAY 1957

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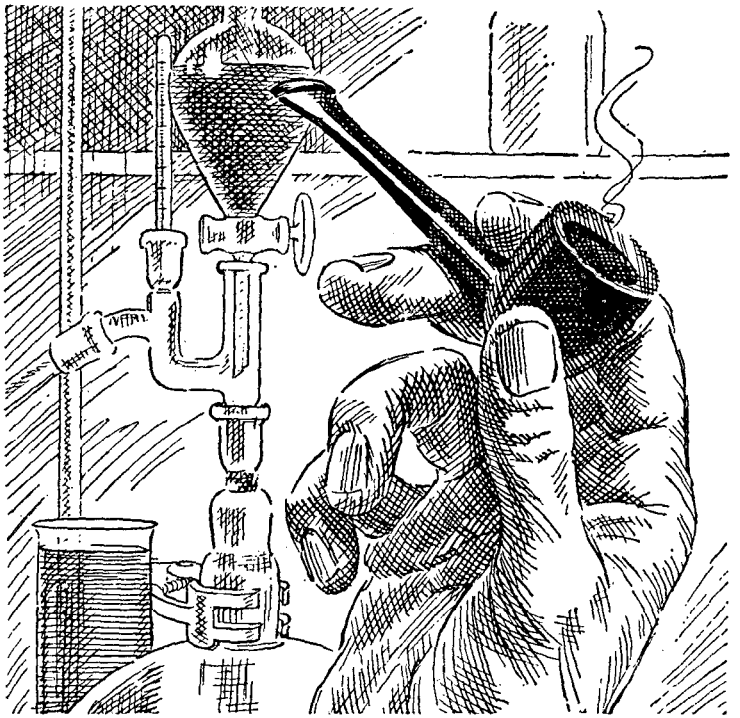

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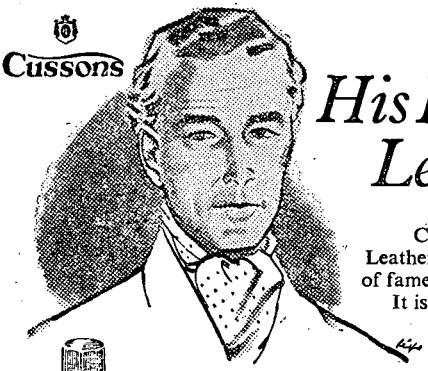

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ARGOSY

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ARGOSY Log Book

OCCASIONALLY we brood over the Advice to Readers columns in other journals and consider starting one ourselves; Horatio, the retired A.B. who helps us, is all agog to give the benefit of his experience to Argosy readers in difficulties. We've been deterred up to now, though, by the fact that all the advice given seems to boil down to three basic precepts: join a club, take up a hobby, put it in a polythene bag.

Could the problems of Argosy readers be solved so easily? We feel they would be trickier material. For instance:

Dear Uncle Horatio, My husband runs a small inn on the Portuguese coast. I think he smuggles opium, as white powder sometimes spills out of his turnups. A dear friend of mine, a Customs Inspector, likes to sit on the bar and stroke my long black hair. My husband resents this friend and has taken to sharpening his knife. Should I tell my friend about the opium?—Sultry, Lisbon.

My Dear, You must give up this friendship; no good can come of it. Why not cheer yourself by trying one of the new short cuts, just as flattering, and easier to manage than all that long hair? And I should advise your husband to put the opium in a polythene bag.—H.

(Somehow we feel this advice is not going to solve that matrimonial tangle.) Or then again, take this case:

Dear Horatio, I am a quiet, simple girl. My sister is one of those mixed-up teenagers and she keeps taking my boyfriends. Now she's going out with one who I'm sure is a werewolf—I've seen him change into a wolf when no one was looking. Should I tell her this?—Baby Doll, Balham.

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Dear Baby Doll, Your sister would only resent it if you told her. Try to be with her and this boy as much as you can, though, particularly at sunset. You should also make more friends of your own age. Why not join a social club?—H.

(Here again, we are not certain if Horatio has hit the right note. Only one of his answers, we feel, combines exactly the ingredients likely to help.)

Dear Uncle Horatio, I think my husband is trying to drive me mad. He keeps turning the gas on and off, and also the television. Lately he has been putting snakes in the kitchen sink. Is this because all the money is mine?—Anxious Fanny.

My Dear, Your husband is going through a trying phase at present, but if you remain calm and take no notice I am sure it will pass over. You must try and persuade him to take up fretwork or chemistry, join a social club, and put those snakes in a polythene bag. And, to keep yourself calm and relaxed, why not take out a subscription to Argosy?

Lovingly, Uncle Horatio

Holly Roth, who makes her debut in Argosy this month, had her first novel, *The Content Assignment*, serialized by two papers, published in England, America, and as a paper-back. She has now written five more, all equally successful.

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Jack Schaefer was born in 1907 in Cleveland, Ohio. He has had a wide variety of interesting jobs, was for a time Assistant Director of Education at Connecticut State Reformatory, worked on several U.S. newspapers. His best-known book is undoubtedly *Shane*; other books are *The Big Range*, *The Canyon*, *First Blood*.

Charles C. O'Connell tells us that he would love to present himself as something startling in shining armour riding on a white charger, with battles, shipwreck, pitiless wastes, and enigmatic oriental eyes in the background, but the actual facts are these: he manages a modern mill in County Cork which produces, unromantically, nylon stockings.

Wilfred McNeilly lives in a fishing village in Northern Ireland and has considerable personal experience of the delights and hazards of deep-sea fishing. When we asked him if orcs are really as ferocious and aggressive as those in his story he gave us a mass of convincing evidence. Orcs have attacked boats off the west coast of Scotland, and *Darkening Reef* was based on a real-life encounter.

New sparkle this month from old friends **Geoffrey Household** and **H. A. Manhood**; adventure by our new expert **Berkely Mather**.

JOHN SILVER

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NYLON MASK

In the inky darkness she felt the featureless face staring

BY BERKELY MATHER

THE men emerged from the orange grove a bare hundred yards ahead of the car. There were two of them, one short, fat, and panama-hatted; the other taller and bare-headed. Diana's left hand tightened on the wheel until the knuckles became white mounds against the suntan. Her right went forward to the glove box and the .45 Webley, and simultaneously her foot came down hard on the accelerator.

She had passed them before she realized with a heart-stopping sense of relief that the shorter man was Sergeant Achmet Kessim and that he was frantically waving her to halt. She pulled up and looked back through the smother of white dust that her racing wheels had raised. The Sergeant was prodding the other forward with the muzzle of a pistol and long before they reached her she could hear his torrent of Turkish and Greek invective.

" It's me, Sergeant," she called, " Diana Southwaite."

They reached the car and the Sergeant shoved the other man into the ditch, still keeping him covered with the pistol. " What you doing here, on red road, alone? " he asked her testily.

" It was white when I started out this morning—" she began.

" White—red—what in hell does it matter? Say, don't your old man tell you nut'n'? " The Sergeant had never been farther than Nicosia but he held a season ticket at police cut rates to the Pallas Cinema in Limassol. He looked a little like Edward G. Robinson and he exuded cheap scent, garlic, and anger.

" I had work to do at the mine," she said coldly. " I am perfectly well able to look after myself. Anyhow, isn't it a police responsibility to tell people when road classifications change? "

His normally good-humoured face creased into a grin. " All right, all right, we don't fight. And now we use your car, eh? You drive us to Larnaca? "

" Certainly," she agreed, glancing questioningly at the man in the ditch who sat hunched dejectedly, facing away from them, hands clasped on the back of his neck.

The Sergeant lowered his voice. " Don't know who he is. Got no papers, no money. Old clothes like you see—no shave.

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He say he English but, hell, I know a Greek who go Blighty-wards, run a beanery in Nottingham, talk English better than me."

"He certainly doesn't look like a Cypriot—Greek or Turkish—not with that hair," she said.

"You never seen Salonika married on Anatolia with maybe a little Gordon Highlander from way back? Gold hair, blue eyes like—like film star."

"The resemblance ends there, poor wretch," said Diana, looking at the bent and tired back. "All right, in you get."

"You don't mind I put him in along you? Then I sit behind if there monkey tricks . . ." He waggled the pistol. "You don't worry. I frisk him good, that cookie. No gun, no knife."

She suppressed a slight shudder. "I don't mind," she said.

"*I't ata*—come 'ere, you!" called the Sergeant, and the seated figure rose and turned towards them. Diana recognized him then.

"I know this—gentleman," she began, conscious as she said it of the barest pause before the last word. "It's Mr. Cauntor, isn't it?"

"That's what I've been trying to tell him." His voice was flat and tired but he grinned through his mask of dust.

"It's all right, Sergeant," she went on. "I can vouch for him. He's English."

"Then why he got no papers? Why he look like a hobo?" asked the Sergeant suspiciously.

"That's for Mr. Cauntor to answer. All I can say is that he's not an Eoka terrorist." She felt herself flushing foolishly.

The Sergeant shrugged. "All right. You answer for him, Miss Southwaite, it all O.K. with me." He turned fiercely on Cauntor. "But listen, mister. The law the same for everybody—English, Turk, Greek. When the road goes red that means everybody off it—everybody that don't want a bullet in the belly, that is. How you think we do our job, eh?"

"I'll take Mr. Cauntor along with me, Sergeant," Diana said soothingly. "That is if Larnaca is any use?"

"Take him, take him." The Sergeant waved them away impatiently and then, because laughter is never far below the surface of a Turk, he smiled ruefully. "Now I don't get the cold beer I promise myself in Larnaca. I go back up damn orange grove on flat feet or boss'll kick my tail and insult my grandfather who read Koran just like my kids read comics. Life 'ard for a copper, damn 'ard."

She opened the door and motioned to the seat beside her. Cauntor got in and the Sergeant slammed the door on him.

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"Watch it, mister—and you, miss," he warned them. "What good it do to take chances? The boys are out today. Two army lorries shot up this side of Limassol."

She smiled her thanks tautly and let in the clutch. In the traffic mirror she saw the fat man pull his hat over his eyes, jump the ditch, and slide into the golden laden trees with an agility that belied his bulk.

For a long time neither of them spoke; then, as a screaming army jeep passed them and blinded them with white dust as thick and warm as a blanket, he broke the uncomfortable silence. "Why *red* road?"

"A white road means that there are no security restrictions on it, red means that—"

"Just something to say." He leaned forward past her and took a cigarette from the tin in the glove box. "May I? I've been smoking Latakia in newspaper until my mouth's like a ruddy Norfolk ham. One for you?"

She shook her head and then, with a prickling sensation that ran the whole length of her arm, realized that his fingers were resting on her wrist. She snatched her left hand away from the wheel and the diamond circlet on her third finger flashed in the sunlight. It was too late. She felt herself flushing again and she fought back tears of rage and humiliation.

"Wearing it as a wolf-scarer, eh?" he chuckled. "Need it with all these army boys on the prowl."

"Damn you—damn you—damn you," she sobbed. "I sent it back to you!"

"Three times."

"We've had two robberies in six months—I was only wearing it for safe keeping until I could *make* you take it back." She dragged the ring off and the car swerved sickeningly. He steadied the wheel and then, as her hand went back to throw the ring out of the window, he took it from her.

"Not Pygmalion likely." He laughed. "My Covenanter forebears would turn in their graves. Ye gods, I could drink for two years in Cyprus on what this cost."

He slipped it into his pocket and the small cold draught that had played on her heart for a year mounted with that gesture of finality to an icy upsurge that choked and blinded her. He flicked the gear lever into neutral and, taking the wheel from her nerveless fingers, guided the car to a gentle stop in the soft verge of the narrow road.

They were on the outskirts of Larnaca and the red ball of the setting sun made a path across the bay to the breakwater beneath

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them. He sat in silence as she fought to regain her self-control; then, as her shuddering sobs died away, he opened the door and slipped out.

"I'm sorry, lass—God, I'm sorry," he said softly, and all mockery was gone from his voice. "If only I could tell you . . ."

The storm had passed now, leaving her cold and empty but once more in control of herself so that when another car pulled up behind them with a scream of brakes, and Christison, her father's mine manager, came hurrying forward, she was able to answer him with a voice which, if not quite her own, at least passed muster.

"Diana, where the devil have you been?" he asked anxiously. "Your father has been worried stiff. I chased all the way up to—" He broke off as he recognized Cauntor. "Hullo," he said awkwardly. "What on earth are *you* doing in these parts? I heard you'd been—I mean I'd heard . . ."

"That I'd been deported as an undesirable?" Cauntor said. "Almost right, too. There's an order hanging over me like the Sword of Damocles. One toot and I'm oot. They can't touch me though while I'm working—and have visible means of support."

"And have you?" Christison asked coldly.

"Sure." Cauntor laughed lightly. "Look at that." He held up his hands. The palms were seamed and calloused. "Six months digging in Curium."

"You mean you're back with the archaeological people?" There was an edge of unbelief to Christison's question.

"Like hell. There's a bottle of best blue-black over that copy-book. No, I've been working on the breakwater."

"What—with the Greek *labourers*?"

"Why not? Dig I can, and there's no percentage in begging nowadays— You try it."

"Cauntor!" Christison exploded. "Why the hell don't you go home?"

"What? Thirty-five bob a bottle and smog thrown in? You crazy?" Cauntor laughed and turned back to the window. Diana sat stiffly at the wheel, looking fixedly down the road. "Thanks for the ride, Diana. I'll probably see you around—I've got a job fixed at the orange-packing station for the winter. Easier on the mits and the smell reminds me of the Old Vic. 'Bye."

He vaulted the low stone wall and turned down the path to the waterfront. Diana still looked ahead of her but she knew that the setting sun would be dyeing his worn, once-white shirt and ragged canvas slacks and touching the tousled sun-bleached hair,

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and she thought of the toppled Apollo that lay in the dust at Curium and, legend said, however often it was lifted onto its plinth, would topple again.

Christison growled in the back of his throat, and she was snapped back to the present. "Damned beachcomber!" he said angrily. "Aren't things tough enough out here already without that sort of out-of-date rake letting the side down? Why the devil don't they send him home? The English community would chip in with his fare if the Colonial Office is too tight-fisted. This is Cyprus, not Pago Pago."

She leaned forward to start the car and her movement made him turn. He looked at her for a moment and then reached out and covered the hand that held the ignition key.

"Di," he began earnestly, "you don't still feel—I mean, you don't—?"

"I feel nothing except damn foolish sitting like a decoy duck on a red road," she said brightly. "Pop gone home from the office yet?"

"Just going as I left," he answered, abashed. "You'd better go, too, before he blows his top."

She nodded and moved forward. "Good night. Thank you for coming out. See you in the morning."

There were no lights in the dock compound but old Hassan, the Turkish watchman, came out of his hut in answer to her one-two-one on the horn and unlocked the main gate.

"What's been happening?" she asked him.

"Bomb in powerhouse, missie," he told her. "All lights go. All Greek mans strike."

It was too usual an occurrence for her to comment upon so she drove in slowly and parked the car in the open-fronted shed near the stacked iron pyrites that came down from the mine in the metre-gauge railway, then she picked her way through the cluttered compound to the bungalow by the sea wall. There were no lights there either, although they had an auxiliary plant for emergencies such as this.

Her footsteps sounded hollowly on the boarded verandah and she shivered a little as a large lizard scuttled across her path, its claws rustling like crumpled paper. She called to her father, although she knew he would not be sitting in the dark, purely for the comfort of her own voice.

There were candles in the kitchen so she went through the dining-room, picking her way batlike to the heavy Victorian sideboard and locking her Webley dutifully in the drawer as her father and Inspector Bayliss had taught her. And now she

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couldn't find the matches nor would her lighter work, and she found herself using her father's full-blooded, bawdy oaths. At last she had the candles lit and the nightly inshore breeze was making their flames dance, throwing the shadows into blacker relief.

The bungalow had not yet started to shed the stored heat of the blazing afternoon sun, and the air inside was heavy and oppressive. She went out onto the verandah and sat in a cane chair and felt the breeze fan her cheek and lift her thick, cropped chestnut hair. " Like a Percheron filly's tail," Cauntor had once told her, " after a hard day in the sugar-beet fields."

Why, in heaven's name, had she to run into him again? And why, having done so, had she to behave like a hysterical schoolgirl? Cauntor was rotten, rotten in the way of an orange when the carob worm infests it—warm, golden and unblemished outside, but hollow corruption within.

She remembered the whispers when first she had become engaged to him and the friends she had lost in her fierce defence of him. He'd made a hash of things in Malaya, and again in Kenya. Cyprus was his last chance—three grades down. He'd been sacked from the Colonial Service in the end and he'd had a succession of sleazy little jobs: working on commission for the Armenians, selling faked Persian rugs to the tourists, managing a troops' leave-centre that the authorities had finally clamped down on. There were hints that he was politically unreliable, whatever that meant.

She had stuck by him through it all, even after he had gravitated through the queer commercial half-world of Nicosia to manual labour on the docks and in the orange groves—right up to the time when he had fought, roaring drunk, for fifty bloody minutes with a Turkish wrestler in Ledra Street and had been given fourteen days in Central Gaol. She'd even forgiven him that, and nearly broken with her father as a result.

Then the job with the American archaeological people at Curium. He'd behaved for six long months and she'd begun to hope again, until that final blind in Famagusta. Even she had seen the futility of it then.

Cauntor was bad—bad because he *wanted* to be bad. Bad in the tradition of horns and cloven hoofs and the fiery downward path of Lucifer—but with the warm, insidious attraction that made other, worthier souls like Christison and the captains and subalterns at the club in Kyrenia react on her like cold bread-and-butter pudding. " In a chipped enamel dish with burnt currants on top," she said aloud and then jumped up impatiently and turned back into the bungalow.

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If there was a strike, Theophilia, the cook, would not dare to come back from the village that night, so she had better start to get supper under way.

She was in the darkened pantry fumbling for some tins when she heard the light footsteps in the dining-room. She had called out, "Hullo, Pop—I'm through here," before she realized that it wasn't her father's sure but heavy tread. There was no answer, and the footsteps ceased.

This, she realized with a detached icy calm, was what she had been reading about over the last twelve months. It happened to people living in isolated bungalows up in the Troodos and Paphos hills—never in safe compounds like this. This was it. Of course it was it. Her father or Theophilia or any of the employees would have answered. What did one do now? Call out again or just wait for it to happen?

She was not conscious of any effort in making her decision. She just heard herself talking. "Theophilia hasn't turned up. I'm afraid it will have to be tins, Pop, unless you'd like an omelet."

People who talked about homely things like tins and omelets didn't get murdered—it was only those who shrieked and begged for mercy, who mouthed and gibbered as she wanted to do, but wouldn't.

People who sang weren't murdered either, and she heard herself trying to sing the words of some tune that Cyprus Radio had been plugging. "*Memories are made of this; oh, memories are made of this. Your lips and mine, two sips of wine* . . . Damn, that reminds me, no tonic water. Sit down on the verandah, Pop Won't be long. It's hell trying to get supper in the dark."

The telephone was in the corner, but between her and it were four candles in a row on the kitchen table. The pantry window was barred and the kitchen door was locked—they kept it locked because that was the seaward and unguarded side.

The only way out was through the dining-room, where her gun was—and something else. No. The telephone—it had to be the telephone. It was on a tied line to the police station: one had only to lift the receiver and they answered. But the candles, the damned candles . . .

The iciness was passing now and she could feel the onset of fear, which would bring with it screaming, stark hysterical panic—panic that would numb, and she mustn't be numb: people who went numb couldn't tip tables and douse candles and lift receivers . . .

The table went over with a crash before she realized that she had moved. Now the receiver was in her hand and to her ear—

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and it was dead and there was no crackle and no answering voice.

She was flat against the wall in the inky darkness and the dining-room door was directly opposite and she felt—*felt*—the featureless face staring out at her. The terrorists wore the top half of a nylon stocking over their heads. Inspector Bayliss had demonstrated it to her once. One wore masks at fancy-dress balls and at Christmas—children loved them—but her mind reeled now as it remembered what that stocking had done to Bayliss's homely Devon features.

The receiver was hurting her ear, and then she heard, again without conscious volition, her voice speaking calmly and naturally.

"Hullo, hullo—Inspector Bayliss? Yes, Diana Southwaite. All the lights are out here and I've just tipped the wretched kitchen table over with the candles on it, clumsy ass. Can you lend us some lamps? Sent some over already? Oh, good. Yes, I can see some torches through the pantry window. Awfully good of you. I thought I heard Pop a few minutes ago, must have been a door creaking, or Pop's arthritic joints . . ." She was giggling and finding it hard to stop.

The voice from the darkness checked her mounting hysteria like a slap in the face.

"Clever, Miss Southwaite—but I happen to know that the wires are cut. I cut them myself."

She felt her lips forming words she could not get out. The muffled voice went on in soft, careful English. "Inspector Bayliss is away on patrol. There are two very timid Greek constables at the station. The Turkish watchman at the gate no longer worries about the mosquitoes. He no longer worries about anything."

At last she brought her dry throat under control. "Who—are you?" she whispered. "What do you want?"

"The first is neither here nor there, Miss Southwaite. For the second, I want the keys to the explosive store."

She could make him out now, a blacker bulk against the slightly lighter rectangle of the dining-room door. He was advancing slowly towards her, picking his way round the overturned table like some obscene bat guided by a sense other than sight.

"I haven't got them—" she began.

"Three people have access to them, Miss Southwaite." The voice, still soft, was charged with menace. "Your father, Christison, and yourself."

"I tell you I haven't got them!" Her voice was rising.

"They are not in the mine safe," he went on, ignoring her interruption. "Christison hasn't been up there today. And

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they are not on your father's body. Give them to me, Miss Southwaite."

"Not on my father's body—?" It burst on her then, and fear had gone. She was shrieking and tearing at the telephone and the flimsy iron bracket that held it to the wall—anything with which to attack the thing that was advancing on her.

"Beast—beast—beast! Filthy murdering beast!"

"Give them to me and live, Miss Southwaite. You have much to live for—"

And then a beam of light stabbed through the darkness and the triple blast of the Sten gun seemed to come from inside her own head. And there were more lights and her father was shouting, "Hold your fire, damn you! She's in there with him." And she was falling, falling, falling through even blacker darkness.

The hard white light of a Petromax lamp hurt her eyes as she came round. Her father, his head bound in a rough, blood-stained bandage, was chafing her hands. Cauntor and Bayliss were carrying out something that sagged and lolled like a black rag doll, a rag doll that had no features . . .

Next morning, she was almost grateful for her father's battered head. Keeping him in bed took her mind from the horrors of the previous night and fended off, if only for a while, his trenchant insistence that Cyprus was no place for a young motherless girl and it was high time she returned to her aunt in Lincolnshire.

She had just seen the doctor off when Inspector Bayliss arrived. "How are you now, Miss Di?" he asked anxiously.

"Bobbish," she answered, and laughed a little shakily.

"And your father?"

"Bad-tempered. He doesn't think I ought to stay here."

"He's right and all. I shall want you both for the inquest as soon as you feel up to it. Won't take long—there's only the three of us."

"Four, counting Mr. Cauntor," she corrected.

Bayliss regarded her for a moment or so and when he spoke he seemed to be weighing each word. "Three, Miss Di—only three. You, your father, and me. The man you mentioned then is a semi-undesirable who moves around the island and mixes with the wrong people."

"But he was *there*," she defended hotly. "He *helped* you—"

"Listen to me, Miss Di," Bayliss said quietly. "You won't be asked, so there's no question of me or any other police officer suggesting or conniving at perjury—but Cauntor wasn't there. You hear? *He just wasn't there.* And if you want to do him a grave disservice just you insist that he was. I'm a common-or-

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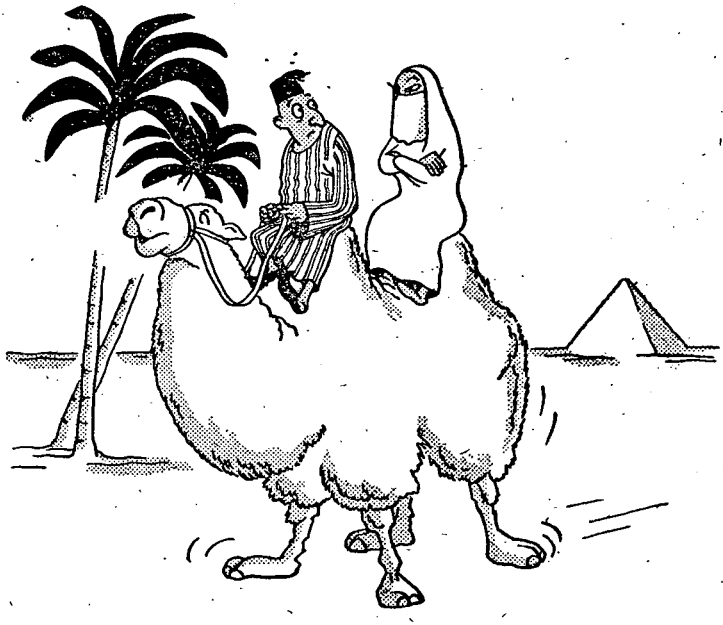
garden colonial copper and I dislike cloaks and daggers and clever secret-service types more than most—but there are some subjects that have to be treated this way. So—just you forget, and no questions about him, there's a good lass."

She turned and watched a string of mule carts file past the compound wire. They were laden with crated oranges and the scent transcended that of the dust raised by the hoofs and the wheels.

"I understand," she whispered.

"That's the ticket," said Bayliss, and fumbled in his tunic pocket. "Oh, here's a bit of nonsense I was asked to return to you. It's not in the lost-property book so you don't have to sign for it." He handed her a twist of tissue paper. "Now I must go and put the hex on your old man so *he* won't go saying the wrong things either."

As she slipped Cauntor's ring back over her finger there was a lightness in her heart that matched the early-morning breeze.



Steady, watch that tree! Look where you're going —mind that pyramid!

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A HORSE CALLED MARK

He wasn't just something I owned
—he was my partner

BY JACK SCHAEFER

NOT that horse, mister. Not that big slab-sided brute. Take any or all of the rest, I'm selling the whole string. But not that one. By rights I should. He's no damn good to me. The best horse either one of us'll likely ever see and he's no damn good to me. Or me to him. But I'll not sell him.

Try something, mister. Speak to him. The name's Mark . . . There, see how his ears came up? See how he swung to check on you and what you were doing? The way any horse would. Any horse that likes living and knows his name. But did you notice how he wouldn't look at me? Used to perk those ears and swing that head whenever he heard my voice. Not any more. Knows I'm talking about him right now and won't look at me. Almost ten months it is and he still won't look at me . . .

That horse and I were five, six years younger when this all began. I was working at one of the early dude ranches and filling in at the rodeos round about. A little riding, a little roping. Not too good, just enough to win a place once in a while.

I was in town one day for the mail and the postmaster poked his head out to chuckle and say there was something for me at the station a mite too big for the box. I went down and the agent wasn't there. I scouted round and he was out by the stock corral and a bunch of other men too, all leaning on the fence and looking over. I pushed up by the agent and there was that horse inside.

He was alone in there and he was the damndest horse I'd ever seen. Like the rest of the folks round here I'd been raised on cow ponies and this thing looked big as the side of a barn to me and awkward as all hell. He'd just been let down the chute from a boxcar on the siding. There were bits of straw clinging to him and he stood still with head up testing the air. For that first moment he looked like a kid's crazy drawing of a horse, oversize and exaggerated, with legs too long and big stretched-out barrel and high-humped withers and long-reaching neck.

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The men were joshing and wondering was it an elephant or a giraffe and I was agreeing and then I saw that horse move. He took a few steps walking and flowed forward into a trot. That's the only way to put it. He flowed forward the way water rolls down a hill. His muscles didn't bunch and jump under his hide. They slid easy and smooth and those long legs reached for distance without seeming to try.

He made a double circuit of the corral without slowing, checking everything as he went by. He wasn't trying to find a way out. He just wanted to move some and see where he was and what was going on round about. He saw us along the fence and we could have been posts for all the particular attention he paid us. He stopped by the far fence and stood looking over it and now I'd seen him move there wasn't anything awkward about him. He was big and he was rough-built but he wasn't awkward any more, even standing still there. Nobody was saying a word. Everyone there knew horses and they'd seen what I saw.

" Damn it," I said. " That's a horse."

The agent turned and saw who it was. " Glad you think so," he said. " It's your horse. This came along, too." And he stuck a note in my hand.

It had my name on it all right. It was from a New York State man who ran some sort of factory there—made shoes, I think he told me once. He'd been a regular at the ranch, not for any dude doings but once a summer for a camping trip, and I'd been assigned to him several years running. The note wasn't long. It said the doctors had been busy carving him up and had told him he mustn't ride again so he was closing his stable. He'd sold his other stock but thought this horse Mark ought to be out where there was more room than there was back east. Wanted me to take him and treat him well.

I shoved that note in a pocket and eased through the fence. " Mark," I called, and across the corral those ears perked stiff and that big head swung my way. " Mark," I called again, and that horse turned and came about halfway and stood with head high, looking me over.

I picked a coil of rope off a post and shook out a loop and he watched me with ears forward and head a bit to one side. I eased close and suddenly I snaked up the loop and it was open right for his head and he just wasn't there. He was thirty feet to the left and I'd have sworn he made it in one leap. Maybe a dozen times I tried and I didn't have a chance. The comments coming from the fence line weren't improving my temper any.

Then I noticed he wasn't watching me, he was watching the

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rope, and I had an attack of common sense. He was wearing a halter. This wasn't any western range horse. This was one of those big eastern crossbreds I'd heard about with a lot of thoroughbred in them. Likely he'd never had a rope thrown at him before.

I tossed the rope over by the fence and walked towards him, and he stood blowing his nostrils a bit and looking at me. I stopped a few feet away and didn't even try to reach for the halter. He looked at me and he was really seeing me the way a horse can and I was somebody who knew his name out here where he'd been dumped out of the darkness of a boxcar. He stretched that long neck and sniffed at my shirt and I took hold of the halter and that was all there was to it . . .

That was the beginning of my education. Yes, mister, it was me had to be taught, not that horse. The next lesson came the first time I tried to ride him. I was thinking what a big brute he was and what a lot of power was penned in him and I'd have to control all that so I used a Spanish spade bit that would be wicked if used rough. He didn't want to take it and I had to force it on him. The same with the saddle. I used a double-rig with a high-roll cantle and he snorted at it and kept sidling away and grunted all the time I was tightening the cinches.

He stood steady enough when I swung aboard but when we started off nothing felt right. The saddle was too small for him and sat too high-arched over the backbone and those sloping withers. He kept wanting to drop his head and rub his mouth on his legs over that bit. At last he sort of sighed and eased out and went along without much fuss. He'd decided I was plain stupid on some things and he'd endure and humour me for a while.

At the time I thought he was accepting me as boss so I started him really stepping and the instant he understood I wanted him to move, that was what he did. He moved. He went from a walk into a gallop in a single flowing rush and it was only that high cantle kept me from being left behind. I'm telling you, mister, that was something, the feel of those big muscles sliding smooth under me and distance dropping away under those hoofs.

Then I realized he wasn't even working. I was travelling faster than I ever had on horseback and he was just loafing along without a sign of straining for speed. That horse just liked moving. I never knew another that liked it as much. It could get him the way liquor can get a man, and he'd keep reaching for more. That's what he was doing then.

I could feel him notching it up the way an engine does when the engineer pushes forward on the throttle and I began to wonder how he'd be on stopping. I had an idea twelve hundred pounds

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of power moving like that would be a lot different from eight hundred pounds of bunchy little cow pony. I was right. I pulled in some and he slowed down but not much and I pulled harder and he tossed his head at the bit, biting, and I yanked in sharp and he stopped.

Yes, mister, he stopped all right. But he didn't slap down on his haunches and slide to a stop on his rump the way a cow pony does. He took a series of jumps, stiff-legged to brake, and stopped short and sudden with his legs planted like trees, and I went forward, bumping my belly on the saddle horn, and over his head and hanging there doubled down over his ears with my legs clamped around his neck.

That Mark horse was as surprised as I was but he took care of me. He kept his head up and stood steady as a rock while I climbed down his neck to the saddle.

I was feeling foolish and mad at myself and him and I yanked meanly on the reins and swung him hard to head for home and that did it. He'd had enough. He shucked me off his back the way someone might toss a beanbag. Don't ask me how. I'd ridden plenty of horses and could make a fair showing even on the tough ones. But that Mark horse wanted me off so he put me off. And then he didn't bolt for the horizon. He stopped about twenty feet away and stood there watching me.

I sat on the ground and looked at him. I'd been stupid but I was beginning to learn. I remembered the feel of him under me, taking me with him, not trying to get away from me. I remembered how he'd behaved all along and I brooded on all that. There wasn't a trace of meanness in that horse. He didn't mind being handled and ridden. He'd been ready and willing for me to come up and take him in the station corral.

But he wasn't going to have a rope slapped at him and be yanked around. He was ready and willing to let me ride him and to show me how a real horse could travel. But he wasn't going to do much of it with a punishing bit and a rig he didn't like. He was a big batch of damned good horseflesh and he knew that and was proud of it and he had a hell of a lot of self-respect. He just plain wouldn't be pushed around and that was that and I had to understand it. I claim it proud for myself that I did.

I went to him and he waited for me as I knew now he would. I swung easy as I could up into the saddle and he stood steady, with his head turned a little so he could watch me. I let the lines stay loose and guided him just by neck-reining and I walked him back to the ranch.

I slid down there and took off the western saddle and the bridle with that spade bit. I hunted through the barn till I found a

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light snaffle bit and cleaned it and put it in the bridle. I held it up for him to see and he took it with no fuss at all. I routed out the biggest of the three English saddles we had for eastern dudes who wouldn't use anything else and that I'd always thought were damned silly things. I showed it to him and he stood quiet while I slapped it on and buckled the single leather cinch.

"Mark," I said, "I don't know how to sit one of these crazy postage stamps and I'm shaken up a bit from that beating. Let's take it easy." Mister, that horse knew what I'd said. He gave me the finest ride I ever had.

See what I mean, the best damn horse either of us'll ever see? No, I guess you can't. Not completely. You'd have to live with him day after day and have the endless little happenings tally up in your mind. After a while you'd understand as I did what a combination he was of a serious dependable gent and a mischievous little kid. With a neat sense of timing on those things too.

Take him out for serious riding and he'd tend strict to his business, which was covering any kind of ground for you at any kind of speed you wanted. The roughest going made no difference to him. He was built to go at any clip just about anywhere short of straight up a cliff, and you'd get the feeling he'd try that if you really wanted him to.

But let him loaf around with nothing to do and he'd be curious as a cat on the prowl, poking into every corner he could find and seeing what devilment he could be up to. Nothing mean, just playful. Maybe a nuisance if you were doing a job where he could get at you and push his big carcass in the way, whiffling at everything, or come up quiet behind and blow sudden down your shirt collar.

Let him get hold of a bucket and you'd be buying a new one. There'd not be much left of the old one after he'd had his fun. He'd stick his nose in and flip the thing and do that over and over like he was trying for a distance record, then start whamming it around with his hoofs, tickled silly at the racket. When there'd be no one else around to see how crazy you were acting he'd get you to playing games, too. He liked to have you sneak off and hide and whistle low for him and he'd pad around stretching that long neck into the damndest places looking for you and blow triumphant when he found you. Yes, mister, that horse liked living and being around him'd help you to do the same.

And work? That horse was a working fool. No. There was nothing foolish about it. The ranch was still in the beef business in those days and he'd never had any experience with cattle before. He was way behind our knowing little cow ponies when it came

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to handling them and he knew it. So he tried to balance that by using those brains of his overtime and working harder than any of the others. He'd watch them and try to figure what they were doing and how they did it and then do it himself. He'd try so hard sometimes I'd ache inside, feeling that eagerness quivering under me.

Of course he never could catch up with them on some things. Too big. Too eager. Needed too much room moving around. He couldn't slide into a tight bunch of cattle and cut out the right one, easing it out without disturbing the rest much. And he wasn't much good for roping, even though he did let me use a western saddle for that soon as he saw the sense to it. Lunged too hard when I'd looped an animal and was ready to throw it. Maybe he'd have learnt the right touch in time but he didn't get the chance. The foreman saw us damn near break a steer's neck and told us to quit.

But on straight herding he couldn't be beat. He could head a runaway steer before it even stretched its legs. He could scour the brush for strays like a hound dog on a scent. He could step out and cover territory all day at a pace that'd kill off most horses, and come in seeming damn near as fresh as when he started. I used to think I was tough and could take long hours but that horse could ride me right out of the saddle and act like he thought I was soft for calling a halt.

But I still haven't hit the real thing. That horse was just plain honest all through. No, that's not the exact word. Plenty of horses are that. He was something a bit more. Square. That's it. He was just plain square in everything he did and the way he looked at living. He liked to have things fair and even.

He was my horse and he knew it. I claim it proud that for a time anyway he really was my horse and let me know it. But that meant, too, I was his man and I had my responsibilities. I wasn't a boss giving orders. I was his partner. He wasn't something I owned, doing what I made him do. He was my partner doing his job because he wanted to and because he knew that was the way it ought to be with a man and a horse. A horse like him. As long as I treated him right he'd treat me right. If I got mean or stupid with him I'd be having trouble. I'd be taught another lesson.

Like the time round about the second or third week when I was feeling safer on that English saddle and forgot he wasn't a hard-broken cow pony. I wanted a sudden burst of speed for one reason or another and I hit him with my spurs. I was so used to doing that with the other horses that I couldn't figure at first what had happened. I sat on the ground rubbing the side I'd lit on

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and stared at him watching me about twenty feet away. Then I had it. I unfastened those spurs and threw them away. I've never used the things again ever, any time on any horse.

Well, mister, there I was, mighty proud to have a horse like that, but still stupid because I hadn't tumbled to what you might call his speciality. He had to show me. It was during autumn round-up.

We had a bunch of steers in the home corral being culled for market and something spooked them and they started milling wild and pocketed me and Mark in a corner. They were slamming into the fence rails close on each side. I knew we'd have to do some fancy stepping to break through and get round them.

I must have felt nervous on the reins because that Mark horse took charge himself. He swung away from those steers and leapt straight at the near fence and sailed over it. He swung in a short circle and stopped, looking back at those steers jamming into the corner where we'd been, and I sat in the saddle catching the breath he'd jolted out of me.

I should have known. He was a jumper. He was what people back east called a hunter. Maybe he'd been a timber horse, a steeplechaser. He'd cleared that four-foot fence with just about no take-off space like a kid skipping at hopscotch. I'm telling you, mister, I had a fine time for the next few days jumping him over everything in sight. When I was sure of my seat I made him show me what he really could do and he played along with me for anything within reason, even stretching that reason considerably. The day I had nerve enough and he took me smack over an empty wagon I really began to strut.

But there was one thing he wouldn't do. He wouldn't keep jumping the same thing over and over. Didn't see any sense in that. He'd clear whatever it was maybe twice, maybe three times, and if I tried to put him at it again he'd stop cold and swing his head to look at me and I'd shrivel down to size and feel ashamed.

So I had something new in these parts, then, a jumping horse, bred to it and built for it with the big frame to take the jolts and the power to do it right. I had me a horse could bring me some real money at the rodeos. I wouldn't have to try for prize money. I could put on exhibition stunts.

I got together with some of the old show hands and we worked up an act that pleased the crowds. They'd lead Mark out so the people could see the size of him and he'd plunge around at the end of the shank, rolling his eyes and tossing his head. He'd paw at the sky and lash out behind like he was the worst mean-tempered man-killer ever caught.

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It was all a joke because he was the safest horse any man ever handled and anyone who watched close could see those hoofs never came near connecting with anything except air. But he knew what it was all about and he made it look good. The wranglers would get him over and into the outlaw chute with him pretending to fight all the way. They'd move around careful outside and reach through the bars to bridle and saddle him like they were scared green of him.

I'd climb to the top rails and ease down on the saddle like I was scared, too, but determined to break my neck trying to ride one hell of a bucking brute.

We'd burst out of the chute like a cannon going off and streak straight for the high fence on the opposite side of the arena. All the people who'd not seen it before would stand up in their seats, gasping, expecting a collision that would shake the whole place. And at the last second that horse Mark would rise up and over the fence in a clean sweet jump and I'd be standing in the stirrups waving my hat and yelling, and the crowd'd go wild.

After a time most people knew what to expect and the surprise part of that act was gone so we had to drop it. But we worked up another that got the crowds no matter how many times they saw it. I never liked it much but I boasted too hard once about how that horse would jump anything and someone suggested this and I was hot and said sure he'd do it and I was stuck with it. He never liked it much either but he did it for me. Maybe he knew I was getting expensive habits and needed the money coming in. Well, anyway, we did it and it took a lot of careful practice with a slow old steer before we tried the real thing.

I'd be loafing around on Mark in the arena while the bull riding was on. I'd watch and pick a time when one of the bulls had thrown his rider and was hopping around in the clear or making a dash across the open. I'd nudge Mark with my heels and he'd be off in that forward flowing with full power in it. We'd streak for the bull, angling in at the side, and the last sliced second before a head-on smash we'd lift and go over in a clean sweep and swing to come up by the grandstand and take the applause.

Thinking of that since, I've been plenty ashamed. I've a notion the reason people kept wanting to see it wasn't just to watch a damned good horse do a damned difficult job. They were always hoping something would happen. Always a chance the bull might swerve and throw us off stride and make it a real smash. Always a chance the horns might toss too high and we'd tangle with them and come down in a messy scramble.

But I didn't think about that then or how I was asking more than a man should expect in a tight spot that can't be avoided

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from a horse that's always played fair and square with him. I was thinking of the money and the cheers and the pats on the back. And then it happened . . .

Not what maybe you're thinking, mister. Not that at all. That horse never failed in a jump and never would. We'd done our stint on the day, done it neat and clean, gone over a big head-tossing bull with space to spare and were just about ready to take the exit gate without bothering to open it. Another bull was in the arena, a mean tricky one that'd just thrown his rider after a tussle and was scattering dust real mad. The two tenders on their cagey little cow ponies had cut in to let the rider scramble to safety and were trying to hustle the bull into the out pen.

They thought they had him going in and were starting to relax in their saddles when that brute broke away and tore out into the open again, looking for someone on foot to take apart. While the tenders were still wheeling to go after him he saw something over by the side fence and headed towards it fast. I saw too and suddenly I was cold all over.

Some damn fool woman had let a little boy get away from her, maybe three, four years old, too young to have sense, and that kid crawled through the rails and was twenty-some feet out in the arena. I heard people screaming at him and saw him standing there confused and the bull moving and the tenders too far away.

I slammed my heels into Mark and we were moving the way only that horse could move. I had to lunge forward along his neck or he'd have been right out from under me. There wasn't time to head the bull or try to pick up the kid. There wasn't time for anything fancy at all. There was only one thing could be done.

We swept in, angling straight to the big moving target of that bull, and I slammed down on the reins with all my strength so Mark couldn't get his head up to jump and go over, and in the last split second all I could think of was my leg maybe getting caught between when they hit, and I dived off Mark sideways into the dust and he drove on alone and smashed into that bull just behind the big sweeping horns.

They picked me up half dazed, with an aching head and assorted bruises, and put me on some straw bales in the stable till a doctor could look me over. They led Mark into one of the stalls with a big gash along his side from one of the horns, and a swelling shoulder so painful he dragged the leg without trying to step on it. They put ropes on the bull where he lay quiet with the fight knocked out of him and prodded him up and led him off. I never did know just what happened to the kid except that he was safe enough.

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I didn't care, because when I pushed up off those bales without waiting for the doctor and went into the stall that Mark horse wouldn't look at me.

So that's it, mister. That's what happened. But I won't have you getting any wrong notions about it. I won't have you telling me the way some people do that horse is through with me because I made him smash into that bull. Nothing like that at all. He doesn't blame me for the pulled tendon in his shoulder that'll bother him when the weather's bad as long as he lives. Not that horse. I've thought the whole business over again and again. I can remember every last detail of those hurrying seconds in the arena, things I wasn't even aware of at the time itself.

That horse was flowing forward before I slammed my heels into him. There wasn't any attempt at lifting that big head or any gathering of those big muscles under me for a jump when I was slamming down on the reins. He'd seen. He knew. He knew what had to be done.

That horse is through with me because at the last second I went yellow and I let him do it alone. He thinks I didn't measure up in the partnership. I pulled out and let him do it alone.

He'll let me ride him even now but I've quit that because it isn't the same. Even when he's really moving and the weather's warm and the shoulder feels good and he's reaching for distance and notching it up in the straight joy of eating the wind he's doing that alone, too.

I'm just something he carries on his back and he won't look at me . . .

★ ★ ★

RENT FREE

If I should ever by chance grow rich
I'll buy Codham, Cockridden, and Childerditch,
Roses, Pyrgo, and Lapwater,
And let them all to my elder daughter.
The rent I shall ask of her will be only
Each year's first violets, white and lonely,
The first primroses and orchises—
She must find them before I do, that is.
But if she finds a blossom on furze
Without rent they shall all for ever be hers,
Codham, Cockridden, and Childerditch,
Roses, Pyrgo, and Lapwater—
I shall give them all to my elder daughter.

EDWARD THOMAS, *If I should Ever by Chance*

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FLYING BUTTRESS

He examined everything including the roof

BY CHARLES C. O'CONNELL

ON the first Sunday of the month the roof of St. Mary's fell in. It was the first time for many years that the name of the village appeared in the press. All the newspapers carried the story, and one headline read: RATHCUMIN CHURCH COLLAPSES—ESCAPE OF CONGREGATION.

It was all pleasantly exciting—afterwards; but on the day of the disaster we were pretty scared and very thankful to be alive . . .

Father Tom Daly celebrated Mass that day and even he, who in one of his sermons at the men's confraternity two nights before had spoken of the repairs that were outstanding to the old building, certainly did not expect the roof to fall in. In fact, nobody did. Not even Noël, who should be an authority on all ecclesiastical structures.

Noël is my nephew, aged five, and he likes to come to Mass with me. Once there, however, he begins to examine the building, starting somewhere at the Gospel side and working down in a vast, all-embracing scrutiny that invariably ends at the row of faces in the seat immediately behind ours. Mr. and Mrs. Kennefick sit there with their daughters Mary Ann and Bridget. I don't think they like Noël to be looking at them, which is nothing to be wondered at. It isn't that the young fellow just looks—Noël stares, a kind of blatant stare that can be very disconcerting.

One Sunday, Mrs. Kennefick told him not to be looking around but to look up at Holy God. Noël tugged at my sleeve, and in a loud voice wanted to know what Mrs. Kennefick had said. In a whisper I gave him the substance of the woman's suggestion, and then he wanted to know why Mrs. Kennefick wanted him to look up at Holy God. Fortunately, the noise of the people standing up for the Gospel saved me from answering.

But Noël isn't very talkative during Mass. He concentrates on examining everything, including the roof. It's a high, arched roof descending in graceful curves to the tall, plain-glass windows. Father Daly dislikes coloured windows because they shut out the

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light. He says that God's house should be as bright and beautiful as possible and that there is nothing brighter and more beautiful than the sun.

Mrs. Maloney, the charwoman, keeps the chapel spotlessly clean. However, her feather duster isn't tall enough to reach the roof, and some cobwebs have collected there. Nobody ever notices them except Noël. At times he points them out to our particular section of the congregation and asks me how they got there and if the spiders who put them there were as big as the famous one he had kept trapped for a week in a matchbox. Mrs. Kennefick tut-tuts very loudly at such questions, and in a fierce whisper I tell Noël to be quiet.

So if anybody knew that the roof was going to come hurtling down it should have been Noël. But he said nothing to me on that eventful Sunday morning. He looked neither to right nor left. He didn't even look back at Mrs. Kennefick, but gazed steadily and unwinkingly at the ceiling.

Sometimes Noël goes through my pockets, or fingers my beads, or starts a rhythmic drumming with his feet, or even begins to talk to himself. But this morning he did none of these things. He just sat and looked at the roof.

Such unnatural behaviour began to alarm me, and towards the Consecration I asked him if he felt all right. He nodded his head without shifting his gaze. In fact, so steadfast was his scrutiny that he began to attract attention.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Mick Haynes giving a look at the youngster and another at the roof. Even Jimmy Duggan, the local publican, who rarely lifts his head from his hands during Mass, was affected; and one by one a little group of sky-gazers formed in the body of the church. I looked up myself but saw nothing unusual. A pool of reflected sunlight made a pattern on the roof, but otherwise there was nothing to warrant such intense concentration.

At the Postcommunion Father Daly came to the altar rails to read the Gospel and announcements, and to deliver a short sermon. To my relief, when the priest began to speak, Noël dragged his eyes from the ceiling and turned them on the altar. His little forehead was puckered and his face was serious, as if he were grappling with some deep problem.

I patted his hand comfortingly just to show that he was not alone and that his troubles were mine. He lifted a face that was almost mature in its gravity, and gazed at me with slightly glazed eyes. My alarm grew. Noël, I decided, did not look well.

I leaned over as Father Daly ascended the altar steps. "Do you want to go outside, Noël?"

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He didn't get my question. In a loud whisper he wanted to know what I had said. I decided not to repeat it, but the youngster was not to be put off. He kept asking me what I had said. Mick Haynes and Jimmy Duggan looked over with mild interest. People shuffled and coughed, and Mrs. Kennefick and company began a chorus of tongue clicking. I glared at Noël and he shrugged his shoulders, returning his gaze to the roof. He kept it there all through the remainder of the Mass.

Immediately Father Daly left the altar, Noël made to get out of the pew. I detained him by the arm and pressed him back into the seat. He made no protest and there he sat while the seats emptied themselves into the aisle and people began to move out of the church. Usually Noël subjects everybody to a blatant scrutiny as they file past, but today he had eyes only for the roof, tilting his head backwards and resting his poll on the back of the seat. Many of the people followed his gaze and then glared at me as if I were responsible for the boy's behaviour. Mrs. Kennefick gave an extra loud tut-tut as herself and retinue departed.

Soon the shuffling of the people died away and the altar boy began to put out the candles. Then Noël said, "Uncle Charlie . . ."

I came to my feet. "Come on, Noël. You were a very bold boy today. We'll go out quietly now."

"I know," he murmured, slipping off his seat, "but who are the—?"

"Never mind now, Noël," I said in my coldest terms. "Genuflect nicely now."

He genuflected nicely and led the way down the aisle. His short socks had come down and were concertina-ed over his boots—nothing short of glue can keep up Noël's socks. A loose heel-tip clattered on the tiles.

At the end of the church he shot a glance upwards over his shoulder. There was an odd expression in his eyes as though he were sending a tacit farewell to dear friends. So expressive was his gaze that involuntarily I looked back. The church was empty, and a broad beam of sunlight slanted through the altar window.

Then, even as we gazed, the roof fell in!

Yes, it was as sudden as that. One moment everything was pleasantly familiar, the next the sunlight was pouring through a twenty-foot gap in the roof, and only the tabernacle light could be seen through a rising cloud of dust from several tons of rubble that had come crashing down on the centre aisle.

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I'm a bit hazy as to what happened after that. My next coherent recollection was of finding myself and Noël in the churchyard, surrounded by a slightly hysterical congregation. Somebody wanted to know if there was anybody still inside, and I said there wasn't since I had glanced back.

Mick Haynes, standing beside me, puffed a cloud of tobacco smoke into my face. "'Twas a good thing ye didn't wait a minit longer, Charlie. They'd be digging ye out from here to Christmas."

Jimmy Duggan looked up from the business of lighting his pipe to say, "Ay," in a doleful voice, as if my fortunate escape had robbed the incident of real news value. Behind me I could hear the shrill voice of Mrs. Kennefick like a dominant note of discord trilling away in the background.

"I don't believe," she was saying to a group of women, "I don't believe in any such nonsense, but that child never took his eyes off the ceiling for one minute. It isn't for me to say, but—" here she stared, about to catch my eye, and I glimpsed the tip of a pink tongue as she moistened her lips—"if you ask me, I'd say it is the judgment of God on people who distract others during Mass."

I edged towards her, and Mick Haynes nudged me with his elbow. "Yerrah, leave her yap away, Charlie—the old bag o' wind."

I wouldn't be stayed, and with Noël's hand clutched firmly in my own, I planted myself before the entire Kennefick family. "Are you implying," I asked her, "that this five-year-old child was responsible for the roof falling in?"

Mrs. Kennefick coloured, panic clouded her eyes for a moment, and then, no doubt fortified by her ring of relatives, she returned to the attack. "The roof was all right until he started looking at it," she said, unreasonably.

People began to gather round us. I had no desire for a scene. "Perhaps," said I quietly, "the child saw something that escaped all of us. Maybe he saw the roof sag or something."

"The roof didn't sag," hooted Mrs. Kennefick as though I had maligned her own flesh and blood. "Hadn't the boy the whole congregation staring at the roof?"

"Then," said I heatedly, "you'll have a hell of a job finding which of them's responsible."

Mrs. Kennefick staggered back a pace. "Don't swear at me, my man! That child is responsible for the whole thing."

Noël looked up at me. "What's the matter with Mrs. Kennefick, Uncle Charlie?"

I stared down at him. He had a bored expression on his face

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and his nose needed wiping. " She says you made the roof fall in by looking at it."

Two puzzled lines appeared above his little nose. Then he shrugged. " I was only looking at the angels," he said.

I stared at him in amazement. " Wh—what angels? "

He looked round at the circle of bewildered faces. " Why, the angels who were keeping up the roof, of course. I was scared in case they'd let go before we got out."

In the silence that followed I could hear the ivy over the porch rustle in the wind. Very humbly I laid my hand on Noël's head. " Let's go home, Noël."

Nobody said a word, and as we walked along the path the gravel grated reverently beneath our feet. At the little gate Noël, with unusual magnanimity, stood aside to let me through, and as I passed him—he winked.

Maybe a speck of dust blew into his eye just then, or a sudden gust of wind, or maybe it was a deliberate, conspiratorial gesture—I don't know. I'll never know, for I didn't ask the horrified question that sprang to my lips.

Somehow I like the idea of Noël seeing angels.

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INQUIRE WITHIN

Learning, they say, makes the heart grow fonder, or do we mean a little absence of mind is a dangerous thing? Play safe, then, by checking your mental stockpile on the questions below, turning, in case of doubt, to page 101.

1. *The only thing they have in common is the name: The Sand Bowl of the East, the Hollywood Bowl. Can you identify them?*
2. *Assassination is luckily rare in this country, but one of our Prime Ministers was shot down and killed in the House of Commons. Who?*
3. *The Golden State, the Silver Streak, Copper-nosed Harry—who or what are these?*
4. *" Give us back our eleven days! " the mob shouted when the new calendar was adopted in 1752. Can you say what the old and the present calendars are called?*
5. *A gowk and a poisson d'avril may not seem to have much in common but there is a connection. Do you know what?*
6. *Thriller writers know that crime does pay, but who coined the phrase " the lucrative business of mystery? "*
7. *When was the Oxford-Cambridge boat-race instituted? Who won last year?*

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A CLUTCH of EGGS

Here's two or three jolly boys
All of one mind,
We've come a pace-egging,
And hope you'll be kind;
We hope you'll be kind
With your eggs and your beer,
And we'll come no more pace-egging
Until the next year.

Eggs in Cut-Glass Dishes

Easter, for us, was the most important and loveliest feast of the year. On Easter morning when we came into the dining-room, we saw the table, which had been enlarged, spread with a Russian embroidered cloth and set with the best china. A creamy pyramid of pascha and a tall, round, brown kulich, like a slender castle-turret, stuck with almonds and fat raisins, stood in each person's place. In the middle there was an enormous pascha for guests and for general use when the private paschas should have been eaten; and every day, for a whole week, sometimes longer, this big pascha in the centre of the table was a fresh one, while, in every spare corner, were lying the eggs that we had coloured and decorated. The kulichi were stuck over with paper flowers, and there were all sorts of pastries and cakes, pirozhki, vatroushki, little chocolate and marzipan eggs in cut-glass dishes. And there, in a splendid position, the biggest samovar was importantly boiling—inviting all to drink as much as they could hold.

Everybody went to church, the men dressed in their best, the women in furs and all their jewels. Our family used to go to the Udyellnaya Church, on the Liteynyi Prospect—a small, fashionable church on the third floor of a building. The place was crowded, there was singing, and everybody kissed everybody else

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three times, said: "Christos voskrésiyé—Christ is risen," and was answered: "Voistiny voskrésiyé—verily He is risen!" Everybody carried a lighted candle, holding it very carefully to avoid spilling grease on best clothes. Some people even had special candle-holders, but it was not infrequently that accidents occurred in the crowded church—usually no more serious than singeing. Irina and I found the service rather tiring, and we amused ourselves by trying to singe people's coat-tails.

IGOR SCHWEZOFF, *Borzoi*

Ovation

Alas! my child, where is the Pen
That can do justice to the Hen?
Like Royalty she goes her way,
Laying foundations every day,
Though not for Public Buildings, yet
For Custard, Cake and Omelette.
Or if too old for such a use
They have their fling at some abuse . . .
No wonder, Child, we prize the Hen,
Whose Egg is mightier than the Pen.

OLIVER HERFORD, *The Hen*

Egghead

Gathering eggs would be like one continual Easter morning if the hens would just be obliging and get off the nests. Co-operation, however, is not a chickenly characteristic and so at egg-gathering time every nest was overflowing with hen, feet planted, and a shoot-if-you-must-this-old-grey-head look in her eye. I made all manner of futile attempts to dislodge her—sharp sticks, flapping apron, loud scary noises, lure of mash and grain—but she would merely set her mouth, clutch her eggs under her and dare me. In a way, I can't blame the hen . . .

Bob had several very good friends among the loggers . . . Once Tom decided he would like an egg-nog and came up to ask me if I would make it. Of course I said that I would, whereupon he went out to his car and returned with a water bucket of eggs, a gallon of cream, and a gallon of whisky. I said, "Do you want me to make enough for the whole camp, Tom?"

"Oh, no, Betty," he said. "I have kind of a headache and thought an egg-nog would taste good. I thought I might as well bring enough stuff for us all to have one."

BETTY MACDONALD, *The Egg and I*

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Omelette Surprise

"Never tell me, Mistress Cookie, that a decent self-respecting hen would be laying scarlet eggs and blue eggs; and wouldn't it be a strange thing if you'd be serving a blue custard or a scarlet soufflé to Mr. and Mrs. Jackson for their dinners and they with their stomicks turned on them and their eyes staring out of their heads."

"Of course not, Mrs. Kerry," said Mum, laughing. "It was Cookie turned them into Easter eggs. She dyed them the most lovely colours."

"Dyed, is it?" said Mrs. Kerry. "And what would she be dyeing them for?"

"Well," said Mum, "it's an old custom, that's all I can tell you."

MARTIN ARMSTRONG, *Said the Dog to the Cat*

Too Bad

Cackle, cackle, little hen,
How I wonder if and when,
Once you laid the egg that I
Met, alas, too late. Amen.

"SAKI"

In the Pink

"We had pink boiled eggs for breakfast," said Robin, "but they were very like ordinary boiled eggs once you got inside."

Boiled with cochineal, thought Lucy. She knew that trick of old; when Robin was a little boy she had always boiled his eggs for his Easter breakfast in cochineal . . .

"Do you remember, Mummy," said Robin, "you always produced a pink egg for my breakfast on Easter Day? I used to wonder how you did it. I thought you must have laid it yourself."

V. SACKVILLE-WEST, *The Easter Party*

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DEAREST CONCHITA

Nothing in life mattered but to enjoy it

BY GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

DEAREST Conchita—You will have had my telegram that I am in Lima. I could not have stayed another day on that ship. I *had* to leave it.

Do not let Mama be worried. As we all told her, it is perfectly correct in these days for an unmarried woman to travel alone. No one showed me the slightest disrespect.

I am quite well, and I am not in love—at least not in the usual sense. I am remaining here for a few days before I continue my journey up the coast to join Papa in Panama. I have of course sent a telegram to him, too. What has happened is nearly unbelievable.

You remember the untidy foreigner who came on board singing at Valparaiso, when you were saying good-bye to me, and saluted us all with such exaggerated politeness that we thought he must be drunk? He and I turned out to be the only passengers. He was travelling on the *Naarden* only as far as Peru, so I had no reason to discourage him. Besides, there was no one else to talk to.

The German Captain and his officers were appallingly formal. I would not like to marry a German; it would be difficult to call him by his Christian name. And the officers would stare at my face, which I hate.

I can always tell what people are like by the way they look at me. Those who are truly kind forget all about my disfigurement after the first few minutes. I do not mean that they try to forget. They really do. Are you surprised at my mentioning what we never speak of?

The tall foreigner was an Englishman, and of tradition! Our grandfathers always said they were mad, but people of our generation have found them most dull and respectable. Now I know what our grandfathers meant.

His name was unpronounceable. It was written Harborough-

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Jones. He said that he was once a Major in the Horse Guards of the Queen of England, but that he found it ridiculous to use the title of rank while travelling in jams and jellies.

Jams and jellies! You would expect them to be sold by a fat Greek from Argentina, not a Major in an aristocratic regiment. I could not tell what he really was, and it would have been useless to press him for an answer. He amused himself by making the wildest fantasies sound like truth. Even when sober, his imagination was out of control.

He spoke Spanish with a queer, clipped accent and tremendous gusto. I think our language and our Latin-American civilization intoxicated him as much as the glass which was too frequently in his hand. He told me that when he spoke English he was quite a different person and of the utmost propriety.

" I have no sympathy for Major Francis Harborough-Jones," he said. " The man I like is Don Francisco Jones y Harborough."

You will see that he had the mixture of nobility and craziness that we all adore. He behaved to me at once as if I were a daughter from whom he had long been absent. Mama will think that an impertinence. But I liked it. I am so shy with strangers. With him I could be gay as I only dare to be at home.

He made me feel completely irresponsible, as if nothing in life mattered but to enjoy it. I forgot my loneliness and that doctors could not help me without leaving a scar as hideous as what they removed. If he had been twenty years younger I should have fallen desperately in love.

On the last evening before the ship reached Lima, where Don Francisco was to disembark, we were sitting together as usual on deck. I will give you his own words as exactly as I can remember them, and you must fancy that you are listening to a play. My own deep voice you can imagine; his was always loud and kind and laughing. Think of Papa telling us stories in bed, and how there was nothing we could believe in but his affection.

" I should like to give a party tomorrow in the ship's lounge," he said, " if I can get the permission of the other passenger and the purser."

I replied that of course he had my permission, and asked if the party was for his customers.

" Buy, buy my jams and jellies! " he called like a street vendor. " Very cheap, my jams and jellies! "

" But calm, Don Francisco! " I begged him.

" Yes, my daughter. I shall not leave out the customers. But I want the President of the Republic, if he will come. The Generals and the Admirals and all the Children of the Sun! What joy, what joy is Spanish America! "

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" Would it not be better to give the party on shore? "

" Dearest "—he used such words most improperly, but as he was a foreigner I forgave him—" dearest, it would indeed! But the fact is that in Peru I cannot give a party because I am not allowed to pay for anything."

That must, I thought, be due to some misunderstanding. The Peruvians are no more hospitable than the rest of us. We all entertain a foreign visitor as well and as long as we can; but eventually—at any rate in commercial circles—he is allowed to pay.

I asked him if he would let me suggest some delicate way of returning hospitality. He insisted that it was utterly impossible. And off he went again upon his love for our Americas, as eloquently as any politician on Independence Day. The long glass at his side was frequently refilled by the steward, who had orders to watch it and take it away when it was empty. He called that being refuelled in the air.

I refused to have my curiosity deflected. " But why, Don Francisco," I persisted, " are you not allowed to pay for anything in Peru? "

" Because, little one," he answered superbly, " I am descended from the conqueror Pizarro and the daughter of the Inca Atahualppa."

" So at last I know why you wear a bath towel instead of trousers," I replied, pretending to believe him.

Such was his usual dress in the morning—a bath towel and an old tweed coat. The first time he appeared in my presence like that I intended to show myself a little cold, but a moment later I was giggling childishly at the look the Captain gave him.

We went to dinner, he at the officers' table, and I, by preference, alone. When I had finished, I waited on deck for him. It was his habit to sit on for half an hour over his wine, amusing himself if none of the officers remained to amuse him. That was, he said, an English ceremony.

As it was our last evening and still he did not come, I went down to my cabin for a book, but he was not in the saloon. On my return, as I passed the ship's office, I saw the purser standing in the doorway and pounding his fist into his hand with one of those clumsy gestures of northerners who do not know by nature how to gesticulate.

Don Francisco, who was opposite him in the passage, must have been much angrier than he appeared; but he only smiled down at the purser and swayed a little at the knees.

The purser was shouting in English. He was a man without manners, as I think the Nazis must have been—nothing but a

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white uniform buttoned too tightly over bad temper. He had twice been rude to me.

You will not believe it, but he made me declare that my disfigurement was not infectious. He resented the presence of a single woman among men.

There is no dignity in the English language when men are excited. The purser was swallowing hard, and croaking, "Jam, jam, ja-a-am! Jam, jam, ja-a-am! Here you will not sell your ja-a-am! No and no! I forbid you to give your party. The *Naarden* is a German ship, not a grocery shop!"

Naturally I passed them as quickly as I could, and did not watch until I was sure they could not see me. Don Francisco was being very mischievous. Evidently he had given up all hope of obtaining his request. He had no interest at all in calming the purser. He smiled and wove his tall body over him like a snake above a fat frog.

He patted him on the shoulder and warned him that he should be careful; that after a heavy dinner in the tropics a man of his build might easily have a stroke. And when the purser began to insult the English in general, he waved him back into the office with the gesture of one who shoos away a fly.

I was sitting in the darkness of the boat deck when Don Francisco joined me. After we had talked a little while, he said to me that curiosity killed the cat. The proverbs of his people are coarser than our own.

I answered with dignity that if it had been I who wished to talk to the purser, I should not have approached him at that hour. Everyone knew that he liked to shut himself up in his office after his over-solid evening meal. He even had a notice of *Verboten* on his door.

Don Francisco admitted humbly that I was perfectly right, and that indeed the purser, unlike the majority of men, was less approachable after dinner than before. For that reason he himself had been particularly tactful, he said, and had knocked his forehead three times upon the purser's counter and kissed the ground.

Then, at last permitting himself some slight loss of self-control, he began to curse the purser for an unbelieving, unimaginative Kraut—which means, I think, a cabbage. And after swearing like a gaucho, though most delicately changing the words, he translated some English oaths. At any rate they were quite unlike our own and far less reasonable. It is permissible to guess at the parentage of someone who has insulted you, but you cannot anticipate the fate of his soul.

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"And what astonishes me," he declared, "is that I damn the man so thoroughly and he is none the worse."

"Thank God for His mercies!" I answered.

He lay back in his chair and laughed. "Well, it is true one would have to be careful. To phrase a curse which is meant so that it can be distinguished from a curse which is not—I do not know how my ancestors managed it."

"Pizarro? Or his Inca princess?" I asked—for you know how I adore the ridiculous, and I wanted him to recover his temper and entertain me.

"Neither," he replied. "From them I am descended on my mother's side. On my father's side we were always witches. Life is like that. To the rich comes more money. Upon the improbable it pours improbabilities. In my club there is a man who has the hereditary right to undress the bishop of his diocese and wash him in the River Thames. In winter he trains elephants. Why not? To him it is all perfectly natural."

One's breath is taken away by such flights of fancy. All I could find to say was that the bishop must be glad his friend had another occupation in winter. Don Francisco answered that the bishop could be washed on demand, whatever the weather, and that I must not put any faith in the common illusion that the English were influenced by common sense. They always preferred the fantastic to the practical.

"My daughter," he said, "in England everything that has ever existed still exists. That is the kind of people we are. There was once a chief witch in Hereford. Therefore there is still a chief witch in Hereford. And I, who have the honour to be at your feet, am he."

"So it is due to your charms that we buy the Hereford cattle?"

"Not forgetting the jams and jellies."

"And we part tomorrow and you have never shown me yourself flying upon a broomstick!"

"For that," he said, "one needs a familiar spirit—if it has ever been done, which I doubt."

"Dear Don Francisco, is there any spirit which is unfamiliar to you?"

He kissed my hand. It always delighted him when I enjoyed this sort of tennis with words, though I myself would wonder afterwards if I had not been too bitter.

"Have you never heard that the soul must be fed as well as the body?" he asked. "And, believe me, the sustenance it prefers is alcohol in moderation. Far better that than to take oneself too seriously and always be whispering, 'Down, Fido!' to something which would be happier in hell!"

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"And without Fido?" I laughed. "Nothing to show me? nothing at all?"

"I am not in practice," he replied. "I am a traditional figure-head, a mere administrator. Old women's tricks are all I know. Like the curing—perhaps—of warts."

Little sister, I did not answer anything. I do not think I even looked at him.

"That is all it is, you know," he said. "A giant wart which lives on you because it has no other home. I could take it away, if you believed."

I recovered myself at once, and told him that it was not a subject which my most intimate friends were permitted to discuss with me. He was quite unconcerned by my rebuke. He stood over me, grinning as if he had just thought of still greater riches of impertinence.

"All the same, I want it," he said. "Do you give it to me?"

I answered passionately that I gave it to him with my whole heart. I do not quite know what I meant. But I was so sincere I could have struck him.

I am ashamed to tell you what happened. I can only say that I was fascinated by him and quite helpless; and the indignity was so swift. He spat on his finger and touched my disfigurement. Then he spat to the four points of the compass and did something with his hands which in the darkness I could not distinguish.

"And now, my daughter, it is good-bye," he said. "You are outraged by me, and would not speak to me in the morning even if we had time to talk. I shall leave the ship early with the customs launch, and as the purser will not let me give my party I shall not return."

I could not trust myself to speak. I stared at him as one stares at a lover who has forgotten decency.

"Remember it is not what friends say at parting that matters," he told me, "but what they think about each other afterwards. Half I have done for you; the other half depends on your belief."

Conchita, I awoke in the morning utterly disgusted with myself. There might be some excuse for him, but *I* had not been drinking. What I had spoken of, what I had allowed—all humiliated me.

I looked out of the porthole of my cabin. Two miles away were the low houses and docks and sands of Callao, the port of Lima. The customs launch was just leaving the *Naarden*, and Don Francisco was in it as he said he would be. It was the first time I had ever seen him well dressed. Immaculate, with a flower in his buttonhole.

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When I came on deck, the ship was alongside the quay. I was most courteously saluted by a captain of police who addressed me by name. He astonished me by saying that in case I wished to land and visit Lima a room in the best hotel had been reserved for me. He also presented to me the compliments of Don Francisco Jones y Harborough, who regretted that he was unavoidably prevented from escorting me since he had been commanded to accompany the Vice-President of the Republic on a visit to Cuzco.

Was I never to escape from his lunacy? I thanked the captain and remarked, controlling my voice as best I could, that it was not my custom to interrupt my travels at the request of foreigners.

"But Don Francisco does not count as a foreigner!" he exclaimed. "He is a descendant of Francisco Pizarro and Atahualppa's daughter. There are only two of them left, and the other is old and in Spain and will die childless."

Who could have guessed that he was telling the truth? I went back to my cabin, with all my emotions shattered. The mirror faced me. As you know, I have trained myself not to notice a mirror any more than you, Conchita, notice the pavement under your feet. But the man's bad taste had made me conscious of that loathsome mark. And then, hating him and in tears, I suddenly realized that never would he have forgotten his courtesy and tenderness unless he believed in himself. What I believed I could not be sure.

That night, little sister, while the ship remained in harbour, I slept sweetly. I went to breakfast early. But no, I did not go to breakfast at all! I went no farther than the door of the saloon. The purser was eating alone, and fingering a black mark on his cheek. I rushed back to my cabin, telling myself that I was a romantic fool. But the lower fragment of my growth had gone, and the skin was red like that of a healthy scar.

I packed, and I fled to the room in Lima that Don Francisco had so thoughtfully reserved me. I remembered his words: that it lived on me because it had no other home. I could not go on to Panama. How could I ever have met the purser's eyes during a whole week—the week that has just passed—while hour by hour I was returning so eagerly to my mirror?

★ ★ ★

ACCORDING TO ONE'S LIGHTS

Is life worth living? It depends on the liver.

BEERBOHM TREE

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The Mermaid

There was a gallant sailor-boy
Who'd crossed the harbour bar
And sailed in many a foreign main:
In fact he was a tar;
And leaning o'er the good ship's side
Into the deep looked he
When a skimpy little mermaid
Came swimming o'er the sea.

She was very scaly, and sang in every scale;
And then she cried "Encore! Encore!"
and wagged her little tail
Till came she to the good ship's side,
And saw the sailor-boy above
And a pang shot through her little heart,
For she found she was in love.

She opened conversation, very cleverly, she thought.
"Have you spliced the capstan-jib, my boy?
Is the tarpaulin taut?"
The sailor-boy was candid, he let his mirth appear:
He did not strive to hide his smile: he grinned
from ear to ear.
She noticed his amusement, and it gave her feelings pain,
And her tail grew still more skimpy, as she began again.

"Oh, will you come and live with me? And you
shall have delight
In catching limpets all the day and eating them all night;
And lobsters in abundance in the palace where I am;
And I will come and be thy bride, and make thee
sea-weed jam."
The sailor-boy did one eye shut, and then did it unclose;
And with solemnity he put his thumb unto his nose;
And said "Be bothered if I do, however much you sing;
You flabby little, dabby little, wetty little thing."

A. E. Housman

Mr. Laurence Housman kindly gave us permission to print this very early work of his brother's which he quoted from memory. It originally appeared in Isis.

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A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

NIGHT THE CAT STAYED OUT

" Which of you's the rat? "
Artful asked with a glare

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

MATRIX STREET is an outpost. On both flanks rises the advancing tide of bed-sitting-rooms and shops; behind it, in the open space caused by a landmine in 1940, office blocks have risen. In Matrix Street the little houses, with their three white steps leading to their gay front doors, still belong to people. People live in them.

They are not the sort of people who trouble the police except when their chimneys catch fire or they lose their dogs. Detective Constable Patrick Petrella was on his way to see a retired Colonel who had been using a real Smith and Wesson .455 revolver to shoot imaginary rats in his back garden. He was using Matrix Street as a short cut. Outside No. 15 he noticed Miss Flint's large tortoiseshell cat, Tinker, sitting on the low wall beside Miss Flint's porch. As he went past Tinker looked at him and lifted the side of his velvet mouth in the lightest of protests. Petrella said, " Good morning, Tinker," but his mind was on the Colonel.

Nearly an hour later he was on his way back. The Colonel had proved amenable to reason, and the right-hand pocket of Petrella's raincoat was weighed down by a .455 Smith and Wesson revolver. Tinker was still sitting on the wall. As Petrella approached he jumped down, ran to the front door, and scratched at it delicately.

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Petrella stopped.

Now that he had time to consider the matter it occurred to him that No. 15 still wore an overnight appearance. The downstairs curtains were drawn. The end of a folded newspaper protruded from the letter-box. Petrella looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock.

It was, of course, possible that Miss Flint was away. But before going away she would surely have made proper arrangements for Tinker. In some households cats were left to fend for themselves when the family went on holiday. Not in Matrix Street. Petrella climbed the three white steps and pressed the bell. He heard it buzzing in the bowels of the house; and then, so faintly that it might have been the echo of an echo, he thought he heard a cry.

He stood for a moment, and heard nothing but his own heart; then went down the steps, through the little green side door, which stood on the latch, and down the narrow side passage. Outside the back door was an untouched bottle of milk. He felt a pressure on his ankle. Tinker had followed him.

The window which looked most hopeful was the smallest of the lot. Petrella, by a torpedo-like manœuvre, and at the expense of a coat button, injected his thin body through the opening, and found himself in a larder. The door was held by a thumb-catch on the outside but yielded to treatment.

In the tiny front hallway he stopped again and called out. This time he heard the answer. It was a feeble hail, and it came from upstairs.

He tried the two bedrooms, without success, noticing that neither had been slept in. Then the voice spoke again.

"Stop pottering about, whoever you are," it said. "I'm in the bathroom. The door isn't locked."

Petrella opened the door and looked inside with caution. It was a long, narrow, coffin-shaped bath with high sides and Miss Flint was sitting in it. She had a towel wrapped round her shoulders.

"This is no time for modesty, young man," she said. "I've been here all night."

Petrella found another towel, wrapped this also round the old lady, picked her up bodily, and carried her into the bedroom. She was surprisingly light. Here he tucked her up as best he could.

"Shout and shout. People must be very deaf in this street. I thought no one would ever come."

"It was Tinker brought me in," said Petrella.

"Darling Tinker," said Miss Flint. "As soon as I'm up and

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about he shall have a whole haddock for himself. If it hadn't been for him, I might still be in that horrid bath—how I hate it—bawling my head off."

"How did it happen?"

"I got in," said Miss Flint. "I couldn't get out. That's all. Something's wrong with my legs. I managed to pull the plug out, and all the water went away. And I got hold of a towel and the bath mat. Lucky it was a warm night."

"Yes," said Petrella. A sudden thought of what it meant to old people to live quite alone came into his head. "You lie quiet. I'll send the ambulance round."

"Ambulance?"

"Certainly," said Petrella. "Just lie still."

"But what about Tinker?"

"I'll look after Tinker. My landlady's very fond of cats."

"It's very good of you," said the old lady doubtfully. "I don't even know your name. Who are you?"

"As a matter of fact," said Petrella, "I'm a policeman."

Two days later he called in at the hospital to tell Miss Flint that Tinker was settling down in his new home. He had a word with the doctor before he went in.

"She's a marvellous old lady," the doctor said. "It would have killed some people a lot younger than her."

"Will she be all right?"

"Certainly she'll be all right. The delayed shock was the worst part of it. That and the very slight stroke which affected her legs. She'll be up in another week. They don't make 'em like that nowadays. You go and have a gossip with her. She thinks very highly of you."

Petrella found Miss Flint in a reminiscent mood. She talked of her father, who had been a Colonel, and of her great-uncle, who had been a Canon Residentiary of Salisbury; and quite suddenly she stopped, and said, "You don't think I'm mad, do you?"

"I've rarely met anyone saner in my life," said Petrella sincerely.

"Then let me tell you something. I was helped."

"Helped?"

"During that dreadful night. Quite late. I'd heard the church clock strike midnight and I knew I was there until morning. Perhaps for ever. For the first time, I really thought about that. Suppose no one came. Not for days, or even weeks. And I started to scratch at the side of the bath—what good I thought it could do—and I think I opened my mouth to scream, and I knew, for my father often talked to me about panic, that if I

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started to scream I should be finished, and at that moment I saw it."

"Yes," said Petrella, in what he hoped was a soothing voice; but it is doubtful if Miss Flint heard him. She was back, in the night, fighting the Terror with only the shades of a long line of hard-living, hard-headed ancestors to help her.

"It was the most beautiful thing. A face, bearded and strong, and lit up from behind by a glow of goodness and kindness. Every time that I weakened, I saw it. I don't know how many times. And in the end I went to sleep. Now do you think I'm mad?"

"I'm not sure," said Petrella truthfully. "How good is your eyesight?"

"Better than yours," said Miss Flint tartly.

"How far away did this—er—face seem to be? I mean, was it just outside the window? or farther away?"

"If it wasn't inside my own head?"

"If it wasn't inside your own head," agreed Petrella.

Miss Flint considered, and then said, "You're so rational. About a hundred yards. Do you believe me?"

"I believe *you* saw it," said Petrella. "The interesting question, to my mind, is whether anyone else, similarly placed, would do the same."

Miss Flint fumbled in the old black bag on her bed table. "Here's the key," she said. "Why don't you go and have a look for yourself?"

It was mad, of course. Petrella told himself so, quite firmly, more than once during the course of the afternoon and as the afternoon faded into the smoky grey of evening. A dream, a vision, an hallucination. Something born of strain and nurtured by shock.

He told no one.

At eleven o'clock, feeling curiously guilty, he let himself into No. 15 Matrix Street, climbed the stairs to the first floor, and stopped to listen. The clock in the hall ticked loudly back at him.

Using his torch discreetly, he moved an old wheelback chair from Miss Flint's bedroom across to the bathroom, and padded it with two cushions. He had a long wait in front of him.

He positioned the chair in front of the bathroom window, settled himself into it. After which he took from his pocket a small but powerful pair of night glasses, and placed them ready.

The gardens of Matrix Street run sharply down to the railway, which is embanked above them; a branch line, little used at night. Beyond the railway the ground rises again, to the backs

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of the big new shop and office blocks which have risen there since the war. These, in their turn, front on the High Street.

Petrella dozed. Behind him, Matrix Street slept the deep sleep of clear consciences and small incomes. An occasional car passed the end of the street, dipped down—what was it called?—a funny little street of cellars and warehouses, which ran through the arch under the railway embankment, then rose again to join the High Street at the War Memorial. He could trace the progress of each car quite clearly: the run down, in top gear, the slight booming noise as it passed under the arch, the gear change for the steep rise beyond, then a glimpse of the lights as the car slowed at the corner.

What *was* the name of the street? Petrella was irritated. He prided himself that he knew his manor forwards and backwards.

Piggott Street? Parrot Street? Perrin Street?

Not street—hill. Pearson Hill—Pearlyman Hill—Purton Hill. That was it!

At this point Petrella, who had had a long day, most of it on his feet in the open air, fell fast asleep.

When he woke he found himself looking at a face. Bearded and strong, and lit from behind by a glow of light. Even as he fumbled for his glasses, it faded.

Petrella shook himself. "Now did I dream that?" he said.

Outside the window everything was dark and quiet. There was a faint flicker of lights from the High Street as a car ran past the corner. He looked at his watch. A quarter to one. And getting cold. He moved across to the bedroom, pulled the patchwork quilt off the bed, and swathed it round him. There was now no question of going to sleep. He had rarely felt more wakeful.

Ten minutes. A quarter of an hour. Another car—it sounded like a homing taxi—came slowly past the end of Matrix Street, hesitated, then dipped down Purton Hill.

Suddenly the face was there again.

Petrella snatched up his glasses; focused them, steadied them, saw nothing but blackness. When he lowered them the face was gone.

Speed was going to be essential. If only I knew when it was going to happen, he thought, I could be ready with the glasses actually up. Otherwise I don't know how I'm going to catch it. On—off, on—off, like a blessed magic lantern.

At three o'clock he suspended his vigil. The face had appeared no more. He got stiffly to his feet and went home to snatch a few hours' sleep.

The following day, after turning matters over in his mind, he

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telephoned Nicholas Freeman. It took him four shots to run him to earth for Nicky was a bird of passage, a young man of a type now almost extinct, who did nothing and did it beautifully.

"Will I do *what*?" said Nicky.

"I don't think I can explain over the telephone," said Petrella. "Meet me at the Crown and Anchor, on Highside, in half an hour."

"Highside?"

"It'll broaden your mind," said Petrella. "Jump to it."

Half an hour later they were sampling the excellent mild beer of the Crown and Anchor, and Petrella was drawing a little sketch for Nicky. "You'd better have a girl with you. Can you manage that?"

"Leave it to me," said Nicky, stroking his small moustache complacently.

"Then you drive twice down this street. Once at a normal pace. Don't stop. The next time, go slowly, as if you were looking for somewhere to park. Stop at the bottom of the slope. Spend about five minutes—"

"You can leave that bit to me," said Nicky. "What happens next? Is it Jack the Ripper? Does some character jump out of the shadows and cosh us?"

"If I knew exactly what was going to happen," said Petrella, "I wouldn't be bothering you. Now be a good chap, and don't ask questions."

At eleven o'clock that night he again let himself into Miss Flint's house. The clock had run down, otherwise everything seemed much the same.

At one minute to midnight he heard the unmistakable exhaust of Nicky's car and gave that gilded young man full marks for punctuality. It turned the corner, passed the end of Matrix Street, and headed for Purton Hill. Petrella had his glasses up to his eyes and practice enabled him to focus them on roughly the right spot.

There was no doubt about it. A window, a pane of glass; a somewhat dusty pane of glass, which reflected back the light of a torch and showed up the face of the man holding it. On for a count of three seconds. Then off.

Petrella lowered the glasses and looked again at his watch. He had some time to wait for the more serious part of the performance.

Punctually at half past twelve he heard the car once more. It was idling this time. Very slowly it approached the top of Purton Hill. Then it changed gear, rolled down, and stopped.

"That's shaken him," said Petrella with satisfaction. This

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time the torch in the window was performing a fandango of dots and dashes. "They don't like that. I only hope Nicky doesn't overdo it."

All was now dark and quiet. Four minutes later Petrella breathed a sigh of relief as he heard the car start, and glimpsed its lights as it swept away. He put back his glasses, and went downstairs, and home to bed.

"It was a swindle," said Nicky indignantly, the next morning. "Nothing happened. Except to the girl."

"On the contrary," said Petrella, "it went excellently. You were an important part of an experiment. A most successful experiment."

"What d'you mean? Nothing happened at all. And I'd promised the girl there'd be some excitement."

"What sort of excitement?"

"Don't be coarse," said Nicky. "I thought someone was supposed to jump out and cosh us. I had a loaded revolver ready under the dashboard, but I never had a chance of using it."

"Thank goodness for small mercies," said Petrella, and meant it.

Later that morning he paid an unostentatious visit to the office block where he had seen the torch in a window. It fronted the High Street, and was an ambitious building, with a reception hall, a gold-lettered board of tenants' names, and, more unusual in that part of London, a commissionaire.

He knew Petrella and invited him into his sanctum. "No trouble, I hope?"

"Not for you," said Petrella. "Just some information. Which offices would it be that possess a window on the third floor, six from the left-hand corner as you look at it from the back?"

The Commissionaire consulted the letting-plan and did some calculations on his fingers. "That's Solly Moss, the turf accountant. No. As you were. Six from the *left*. That's the new crowd. Novelty Projects."

"What do they do?"

The Commissionaire scratched his head. "I don't rightly know," he admitted. "They took two rooms—let me see, three weeks ago. But they haven't started up yet."

"But they've got the keys?"

Yes, they had the keys. And a key of the front door. That was the right of all tenants, since the Commissionaire went off duty at six. The last man out locked up. They've never had any trouble yet. Had someone been complaining?

"No one's complained yet," said Petrella. He discovered that the Commissionaire had never actually seen any of the members

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of Novelty Projects and jotted down the name and address of the letting-agents.

Midday found him strolling down Purton Hill. It was a curious little street. First came the blind side of the corner house of Matrix Street, then a high blank wall, which no doubt marked the garden of this property.

Thereafter the road curved slightly, before running down to the railway arch, and at this point there was a building, fronting on the road and backing on the railway. It had the look of a disused warehouse.

A stubby crane projected at first-floor level, and three low, heavily barred, arched openings, at pavement level, suggested the existence of a considerable cellar.

Instinct told Petrella that he had found what he was looking for, and it also warned him not to stop. He walked past without a further glance. It could have been an indiscretion to walk down Purton Hill at all. He only hoped it had not been a fatal one.

His next call was on Messrs. Ryan & Gosport who managed most of the worth-while property in Highside. Old Mr. Ryan greeted him with an enthusiasm which suggested a guilty conscience, but was actually nothing but good nature.

"The warehouse in Purton Hill," he said. "Now that is odd. It really is odd. Fancy you mentioning that. A month ago you could have had it for the asking. A white elephant. No market for it. Now I've let it."

"Not by any chance," said Petrella, "to a firm called Novelty Projects?"

"That's them. Nothing wrong with them, I hope?"

"Nothing that I could prove," said Petrella cautiously. "Who actually did the negotiations?"

"A most respectable-looking man. With a beard. I've got his name somewhere here. Henniker."

Petrella made a note of the name and the address, but without much hope. It had the look of an accommodation address. As he turned to go, he said, "What was so special about these premises? Why were they so difficult to get rid of?"

"They were put up fifty years ago," said Mr. Ryan sadly, "by a wine firm. Lovely cellars. Just the thing for storing wine. Then the railway came. Too much vibration. Spoilt the wine. No one else wanted them."

"And those are the cellars you look into, at pavement level? I see. Yes. Thank you very much."

He spent a busy afternoon in the Criminal Records Office, and then sought out his ally, Sergeant Gwilliam, who had once played

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Rugby football for the Metropolitan Police, but had a shrewd Welsh head on top of his vast bulk. He told him all he knew, from beginning to end, including the rescue of Miss Flint, at which the Sergeant laughed immoderately, but when Petrella had finished he scratched his head and said, " It certainly sounds like something, but *what*? "

Petrella said, " The C.R.O. are inclined to think that my friend with the beard, Mr. Henniker, may be none other than ' Artful ' Andrews. He's out of nick just now. And he works with a little mob."

" Andrews," said Gwilliam thoughtfully. " Shop robbery? "

" Specializing in small jewellers' shops and pawnbrokers'."

" Yes," said the Sergeant. " You might have something there. I think we'll bring the Inspector in on this."

So Petrella told his story all over again.

" And your idea is? " said Inspector Haxtell.

" I couldn't see at first how it worked, sir. But when you walk down Purton Hill it's obvious. There aren't any street lamps until you get under the railway arch, and it's a nasty little slope with a half turn at the bottom. Any car that comes into it would be almost bound to flick on its headlights. And they would shine straight into one or other of the arched openings. They're at pavement level where the road curves. And I should imagine, though I didn't stop to look, that they give directly onto the old cellar."

" I see," said the Inspector. " So if you happened to be doing a little quiet work in the cellar—after midnight, say—something you couldn't very well hide, like swinging a pickaxe—you'd be likely to be spotted."

" That's just what I thought," said Petrella. " You could have blocked up the arches—but that might have been even more suspicious. I haven't quite worked out all the angles, but I should imagine they'd need two guards—one near at hand to warn them about patrolling policemen and pedestrians and so on. And a second one in the office, with a torch, to give them plenty of warning when a car was coming."

The Inspector had been studying a large-scale street plan and directory.

" I see," he said, " that Samuelson's shop is in Comber Street —that backs on Purton Hill. If it's a tunnel they'd need to go about forty yards. I wonder how far they've got."

A few days later when at the consummation of two weeks' hard work, the Andrews mob stepped through a carefully cut hole into the cellar of Mr. Samuelson, the well-known pawnbroker and

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jeweller, they found an interested reception committee awaiting them.

"Artful" Andrews was a professional, and he acknowledged a fair cop.

"I suppose I been shopped," he said, glaring round at his associates. "Which of you's the rat?"

Petrella, who was present, felt tempted to point out that it was not a rat, but a large tortoiseshell cat, that had been basically responsible for his downfall.

But he refrained. Junior Detective Constables were not expected to make jokes.

Every time I take aim—he sits down!

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SERPENT

Adam had no lovelier Eden
than this palm-fringed lagoon

BY MARK DERBY

BILL Montrose was swimming in the lagoon when the little motor boat rounded the palm-tufted headland. At sight of it he bounced exultantly in the water and began to swim with eager, striding strokes to meet it.

The last lovely hour of the day had begun. His pearl lugger floated like a gem itself in the emerald water under the sapphire sky. Ashore, his bungalow, thatched with golden palm-leaf, rose in the vivid sunshine against a background of forest-clad mountain. Adam in Eden hadn't a lovelier home than Bill Montrose's island. But Adam had known loneliness in Eden, and once or twice lately Bill Montrose had gone cold in the sunshine at the thought of what the island would be like when Anna went away. If she went away . . .

"Anna!" His strong brown face, clear brown eyes, and bleached brown hair shot up out of the water and his shout rang across the lagoon. There was a movement in the deep shadow under the mission boat's palm-leaf awning. An arm and a face appeared. But not Anna's.

The boat turned and in a few seconds drew alongside Montrose. Somebody was leaning over the side, a man, though from the grey shock on Montrose's face he might have been a ghost.

"Hullo there, Bill!" The shout was friendly and a hand came reaching over the side; but Montrose didn't take it.

"Well, Blair," he said, recovering himself, "you'll want a drink, I suppose. Come up to the bungalow." He heaved himself aboard and a few seconds later they were climbing the warm white beach. A vividly contrasted picture they made, Montrose so frank and healthy and outdoor, Blair pale and puffy in his creased shirt and slacks, unhealthily indoor.

"You're lucky," Montrose said, pointing to a long rattan chair. "There's some beer."

"But warm, I'll bet," Blair said sourly.

"Where d'you think you are? This isn't the Ritz."

"No Scotch?"

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"No." He met Blair's small, hard sandy eyes. "I cut out Scotch after a certain night you'll maybe remember."

"I remember," Blair said. "I remember everything. And I suppose you've been trying to forget."

"That's right," Montrose said, wrenching off the cap of a beer bottle with his teeth and spitting it over the rail of the verandah.

Blair stared. "Well, your teeth certainly haven't weakened on five years of fish diet!"

"Trick I learnt from my divers," Montrose said, pouring out. "Those boys have taught me a whole lot."

"And you've taught them a thing or two, haven't you? To keep their mouths shut, anyway. I was talking to a bunch of 'em just after I came off the ship. Minute I brought up the black pearl they all shut up like—well, like oysters!" He laughed at his joke and suddenly broke off to lean forward, his puffy eyes keenly focused. "No need to tell you what brought me here, is there?"

He had taken a newspaper clipping from his pocket and threw it across the table beside Montrose's glass. The pearler didn't even glance at the headlines.

SOUTH SEA DIVER'S WONDER FIND

£25,000 Black Pearl Offer Refused

"All right, Blair," he muttered. "Say what you've come to say."

Blair sneered. "Short and snappy, eh? Well, I'll make it short and snappy, too. Last time we had a drink together—you're right, it was Scotch—we planned to lay our hands on a packet of gems and split even. It didn't work out, so we split a gaol sentence instead. But not even."

"You carried the gun and fired it," Montrose cut in, "and there were two previous sentences chalked up against you. I never knew you had the gun and it was the first and only time I stepped an inch outside the law. Five years for you and one for me was a fair enough split."

"I served my five," Blair snapped. "You never served five weeks. A smart gaolbreak for such a tender innocent! If those warders had caught you that night you'd have wished you'd never been born."

"If I'd stayed shut up another week I'd have cracked to blazes."

"A sensitive soul!" Blair sneered. "Needs freedom the way his body needs air! And so you cleared out of Africa, came here in search of freedom, and found a fortune."

Montrose only said, "Get on with what you have to say."

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Blair's pale-lashed eyelids snapped shut and opened again. "We missed our luck that time, Montrose. Now it's fallen in your lap with a bang. It's just a matter of a share-out I came to talk over. I'm not asking for more than a third."

The answer came promptly. "You've had your journey for nothing, Blair."

Sudden alarm shook the puffy cheeks. "I saw it in two papers," Blair said. "Don't try telling me there's nothing in it."

"Oh, it's true enough," Montrose assured him, "if you allow for a little exaggeration. But there won't be any share-out because the black pearl's not for sale."

"Not for sale! You think I'll swallow that?"

"Swallow what you like, Blair. It's not for sale."

Blair finished his beer, with a grimace at its temperature. "Well, that's straight enough. And so's this. It's either a quick sale and a third-share for me or you'll be meeting your warder friends again. They don't like gaolbreakers in South Africa. I've heard of sentences being doubled when they recapture one."

Montrose had taken a small embossed leather box from the table drawer and held it in his hands, frowning dreamily down at it. He said, "It's not for sale, Blair. Five years ago I was a young fool and with my first slug of Scotch in me I let myself be talked into breaking into that office. You only wanted me along for my muscle, because you couldn't smash in that door yourself. There was no partnership. I owe you nothing and that's what you'll get."

"And when the Cape Town police get my letter? With all the details?"

Montrose blinked. "This is another country, another continent. Here I'm a decent citizen; I've worked five years to prove it. Organizing the pearl fishing has made a big difference to this island, created employment, brought in money. You saw the new clinic over in the town? Well, I built it and it runs on my money. Doesn't mean I deserve thanks for it—it's just a first instalment of *my* thanks to the fine people here, my neighbours. It's like this, Blair, since I saw you last I've grown up and this place and these people here have helped me grow up. They and the pearls . . ."

He wasn't looking at Blair now. His fine eyes wandered across the lagoon to the handsome white lugger and back to the divers and their children walking down the beach for their last bathe of the day.

"I learnt a lot from the pearls. I came here to find them and make money out of them. Then I found a few. Before that I'd

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never had much idea of what beauty was or what it did for you. Pretty girls caught the eye, and you might get a slight lift out of a sunset or a bunch of roses or something. That was all. But the pearls fascinated me and in time I learnt from them the meaning of quite a few things . . . beauty, purity, colour, perfection. It was because I loved them, I suppose, and they were the first things I ever learnt to love outside myself. And once you start looking outside yourself you grow up and the world and its beauty are yours.

"Never mind about it sounding sentimental—if the truth sounds sentimental to you so much the worse for you! And you're right, I learnt what freedom meant here, though I'd begun to find out in gaol. If I had to go back . . . lose all this, rot in a cell for months, how'd I ever take it?"

He was talking to himself, staring down at the tide ebbing from the beach and all the shadows moving eastward as the sun sank westward. Eden. And a serpent had driven Adam from his Eden, too . . .

Blair's harsh voice cut in impatiently. "You know me, Montrose. You know that what I say I mean. And if I send that letter to the Cape Town police, signed or unsigned, they'll get you back. I've seen it happen. Extradition, they call it. Once the authorities round here know you're a gaolbreaker you'll be shipped back to South Africa in a hurry. You know you will."

Montrose stared at his strong, naked feet. Yes, he did know.

Blair gave him a puffy smile. "But there's no need to go back. No need at all. Only it has to be a third-share in the black pearl."

The sound of the motor came suddenly across the lagoon as the mission boat rounded the headland again. Montrose stared down at it with a nightmare chill and then faced his visitor.

"Forget the black pearl, Blair," he said. "It's not mine any more."

"Then you *have* sold it!"

"No." He opened the miniature box in his hand and Blair started forward greedily. Bedded in cream velvet lay a black pearl of amazing size and lustre.

It was mounted on a narrow platinum ring.

Blair swore and Montrose gazed down with tragic eyes at the girl who stepped ashore just as the sun set in a blaze of shivering rose and gold.

Anna said, "I didn't like the look of your visitor. Is he another dealer after the Queen? He was pumping the divers about her as soon as he landed."

"Yes, he's after the Queen," Montrose told her.

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It was Anna's Uncle Ben, the island missionary, who had named the black pearl. The first time he'd seen it he had exclaimed, " Ah, but it's the Queen of Sheba ye have there, son! Remember the way she's called in the Song of Songs, ' black but comely? ' " They'd called it the Queen since that day.

" How's Uncle Ben coming along? " Montrose asked.

" He's fine, but now he's on his feet he just won't rest," she told him. She added, " I wish he'd come back to Australia with me on next week's boat."

She turned away as she spoke, but he kept his eyes fixed on her face, on the flushed honey-tan, the gentian-blue eyes with their unexpected black lashes, the hibiscus-red lips parted over vivid teeth.

He said, " You're going next week? "

" Uncle Ben won't need me any more," she said, still turned a little from him.

It was he who had sent for her when the old man's illness had taken an alarming turn. She was the old priest's nearest relative and a nurse in a Melbourne hospital. Ignoring the old man's protests, Montrose had radioed an SOS to her and she'd arrived in six days, with the help of a couple of planes and a couple of boats. That was eight weeks ago. He had been in love with her for seven.

An island boy stepped onto the verandah in bare feet and set a lamp on the table between them. Anna smiled at him and asked, " Eye better now, Malatu? "

He grinned and said, " Better, but one more time, please," and went down on one knee beside her while she took a phial of Argyrol from her small Red Cross case, poised the dropper over his no-longer-inflamed eye, and squeezed a drop in.

When he'd gone out Montrose grinned and exclaimed affectionately, " Poor old Malatu! "

" How d'you mean, poor old Malatu? " she queried.

" Oh, I dunno. Nothing to do but hang around this place and look after me while I'm ashore."

She said, not looking at him, " Is that such a tragic fate, Bill, living in your house and looking after you? "

He held his breath a moment. " Isn't it, then? " was all he found to say.

" I shouldn't have thought so," Anna answered. " I don't suppose you even see how they think the world of you, these people here."

" Come to that, I think the world of them," he murmured, embarrassed. " And they think the world of you—did you know that? They'll be . . . sorry to see you go."

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For a second their eyes met and he held his breath again and his big hands hardened into fists. Then, raising his chin, he took the plunge. The scene had to be played differently, now that Blair had cast his black shadow. He'd have to gag and think up new lines. The same action, but different words.

"Anna, there's a favour I want to ask."

"A favour?"

"Yes." He nerved his eyes to turn from the dying tropical sunset and meet her own in the lamplight. "When you go back to your home and friends down there I want you to have something to remember the island by, the island and all of us here. You've asked twice why it's been such a time since you saw the Queen. The answer is she was being fixed up for her journey home with you."

He opened the tiny embossed box in the lamplight. "From all of us," he said.

At sight of the gem's dusky blush she gave a little cry, and another when he lifted it and she saw the ring it had been set in.

"I hope it fits," he said, and then, blinking, "It doesn't matter which finger you wear it on."

In the thirty seconds between Blair's departure and Anna's arrival he had made his decision. Never mind what it cost, he'd keep the account straight. He'd never give in to Blair and he knew better than to expect any mercy from him. The pearl was for Anna, nothing would alter that. If it couldn't be an engagement ring now it still had to be hers.

The two most beautiful things in the world, the two things he loved most in the world, belonged together. And when she had taken it he'd make his way back to Cape Town, pay his debt there in full, and when they released him make for Australia, tell Anna the truth—once all was over and the account straightened he'd be able to tell her—and ask her to marry him. If she hadn't married somebody else by then.

Anna had the ring in her hand. She said, "It's so lovely I want to cry."

"Put it on, Anna," he urged her.

She seemed to wake out of a dream. "But of course I can't, Bill," she sighed.

"It's yours," he insisted. "Take it, Anna."

Her eyes were baffled and hurt. "How could I? Why, it's worth a fortune."

He said, "I thought you understood. I told you I'd never let it be bought or sold, and I wouldn't. But what would I do with it here, keeping it shut up in a box? Beautiful things are meant to be seen. Pearls are for beautiful women and you, my darling, are

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so beautiful. And all of us here owe you so much. So it's from all of us. I told you we'll never know who found the Queen, anyway. Not one shell in a thousand gives a pearl and we'd fished hundreds that day. So just take it, from the boys and me, and remember us sometimes."

She shook her head in distress. " Bill, I know what the Queen means to you, why you won't sell her. I've seen how your face changes when you open that little box. Nothing in the whole world means more to you."

He shook his head gravely. " No, Anna, that's not true. Not any more."

She stood up and set the ring back in its box. " I must go back and get Uncle Ben's supper. I'll be over at sunset tomorrow."

He said impulsively, " Wear it just for tonight, Anna. Take it for tonight. I want to see it on your hand."

She hesitated, tempted by the pearl's exquisite beauty, and suddenly she held out her hand. Her right hand. Gently he slipped the ring over her third finger and she closed her eyes a moment, as if it hurt her. For a second he held her hand, seeing how hand and gem doubled each other's beauty, loving the hand for its skill and healing as much as its surface loveliness. Then he drew away from her and turned his eyes beyond the lamplight to the starlit picture of sea and island.

Paradise lost . . .

" Good night, Bill."

Suddenly she turned and ran down the steps to the white beach, calling for the boatman.

Bill Montrose stood rigid at the verandah rail until the hum of the motor faded to silence beyond the steep headland. Then he answered her.

" Good-bye, Anna," he said softly.

At sunrise, Montrose gave orders for the lugger to sail at noon. When Anna came over that evening she'd find him gone, only Malatu with a note wishing her good-bye and begging her to leave the Queen where she belonged, on her hand.

When the mission boat entered the lagoon an hour before noon, he frowned at the prospect of another meeting with Blair. But he had nothing to lose now. He didn't have to talk to Blair any more. He could throw him off the verandah.

But it wasn't Blair. It was Anna.

She came up the steps in a dazzling white sweater and skirt, barefoot like himself. Her small Red Cross case was in her hand, and the smile she gave him was grave, maybe a little nervous.

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His own smile was uncertain. "I thought it was Blair," he said.

"Blair?" She turned her eyes out to sea and said, "He'll be well into his third iced beer by now, I expect."

Following her glance, he saw the French boat that had brought Blair to the island steaming west.

"You mean he's gone?"

"That's what I came over to tell you."

Anna stood by the rail, almost the whole length of the verandah from him, a baffling look in her clear eyes, hands behind her back like a schoolgirl reporting to the headmistress.

"When I got back to the mission last night he was waiting for me. He'd slipped getting out of the boat and cut his hand badly on some coral. They'd dressed it beautifully at the clinic, but he was fussing and insisting on my examining it. When I asked him why he hadn't gone out to the doctor on the French boat, he said he wanted to have a talk with me anyway."

She hesitated a moment and turned her eyes away. "I couldn't understand him at first. He'd got hold of the idea that you and I . . . were engaged. He saw the ring, I suppose, without noticing which hand it was on. Anyway, he started making sly insinuations about you. He seemed to be trying to talk me into—well, into breaking off the engagement he'd invented. Asked how I fancied being the wife of a gaolbreaker the police were still after. He said you and he had been partners, jewel thieves.

"I just dressed his hand and said nothing, but this morning he was back with the dressings all undone and the bleeding starting up again. He'd done it on purpose, I believe, to get another chance to talk to me. But when he began talking about escaped convicts and extradition laws and a note from him putting the police on your trail, I just got up and said he still had time to get the French doctor to see his hand if he hurried because I'd had enough. Then I went out."

Montrose stood grim and silent at the far end of the verandah rail.

Anna moistened her lips. "I heard a shout on the waterfront just after and there he was, with the dressings all trailing, shouting for a canoe to rush him out to the French boat. They'd weighed anchor, but he just made it."

Her long black lashes flickered nervously then and she moved slowly along the verandah until she stood in his big shadow. A moment's hesitation and finally she brought her hands from behind her back and held them out to him.

The Queen was gone.

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"When I started on Blair's bloodstained dressings," she explained, "I had to take it off. I put it in the lid of my Red Cross case. And when I went back after Blair had gone the Queen was gone, too."

Slowly her eyes rose and met his. She said, "Oh Bill!" unsteadily and her bare foot touched his and her hair brushed his mouth as she lowered her head again.

"Anna!" It was only a whisper, as gentle as the strong arms that went round her. "I don't have to say it, do I? You know, don't you?"

"Yes, Bill," she answered breathlessly, "I know. But say it."

He said it and kissed her.

"And you knew Blair was a jewel thief," he said, after a while.

"Yes, Bill. That was why." She added, "He said you were one, too."

He explained. Out on the lagoon the lugger's sails were going up like flags for a festival. He called Malatu and sent him to let the divers know he wouldn't be going out that day after all. When the boy had gone, with his usual grin for Anna, Montrose said, "Then you're not too daunted at the prospect of sharing Malatu's fate?"

"His fate?"

"You said yesterday you didn't think it too tragic. Living in my house and looking after me."

She smiled up at him. The French boat was passing out of sight beyond another island. Montrose flashed a single exultant glance over beach, lagoon, crag, and ocean.

Paradise regained.

"The poor Queen!" Anna sighed.

He said, "I'm glad I saw her once on your hand. Even if it was the wrong hand."

Anna said, "I'm so sad about her. But there wasn't another way. And she saved us for each other, didn't she? She bought us our future." And now it was her turn to take in the whole vivid picture with a single glance. "She bought us this."

His arms drew her close into his shadow again. "And this, my lovely," he said. "This."

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YOU NEVER CAN TELL

Shaw was walking along Piccadilly when an excited American tourist rushed up to him.

"Say," cried the Yankee, "are you Shaw?"

"Positive!" replied Shaw calmly, and walked on.

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On these downy pillows lye,
Whose soft Plumes will thither fly

ANDREW MARVELL

Look upon Endymion, the Moon's minion, who slept threescore and fifteen years; and was not a hair the worse for it. Can lying abed till noon then, being not the threescore and fifteenth thousand part of his nap, be hurtful?

THOMAS DEKKER, 1570-1632

Smiling Lips

Sleeper, the palm trees drink the breathless noon,
A golden bee sucks at a fainting rose,
Your lips smile in their sleep. Oh, do not move.

Sleeper, oh, do not move the gilded gauze
Which lies about your gold, or you will scare
The sun's gold fire which leaps within your crystal.

Sleeper, oh, do not move; your breasts in sleep,
Allah, they dip and fall like waves at sea;
Your breasts are snow, I breathe them like sea foam,
I taste them like white salt. They dip and fall.

Sleeper, they dip and fall. The smiling stream
Stifles its laugh, the gold bee on the lea
Dies of much love and rosy drunkenness,
My eyes burn the red grapes upon your breasts.

Sleeper, oh, let them burn, let my heart's flower,
Fed on the rose and santal of your flesh,
Burst like a poppy in this solitude,
In this cool silence.

from The Thousand and One Nights

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Sweet Dreams

All night I dreamed of Philine. I never dream a great deal, and usually can't remember my dreams, but these connected dreams were vivid in my memory next morning. The strangest was where Philine came into my room and undressed and turned into Lola.

In another part, strangely, Philine and I were walking together in Persepolis. We were going along the old road that leads across Shattuck's property to the Ilevert branch of the Alabama River. In this dream Philine had picked a spray of yellow jessamine, and was holding it in her teeth while she talked, turning it round and round, her face framed by those black locks.

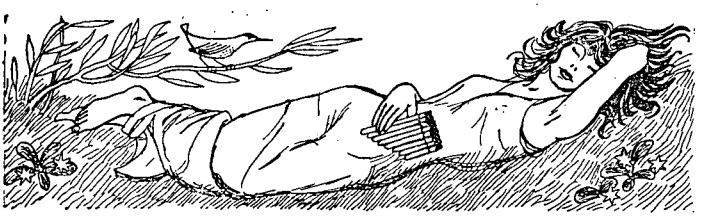
But always in the dream her eyes were the same, looking right at me, right to me, right through me, saying in effect, " Take me." Lola in the dream was like Lola in life, like I had seen her that time before the mirror. I suppose that most girls would be pretty amazed if they learned some of the cavortings and carryings-on they do in boys' night-thoughts.

EUGENE WALTER,
The Untidy Pilgrim

Careless Sleep

O love, the little wood doves call and call
Through this soft country, and the honeysuckle
Sends up its perfume to your window here,
But you sleep on. Wild rose and celandine
Wake for you in these meadows, from his elm,
An oriole repeats his clear cadenza,
The thrushes sing of you, but you sleep on.
You do not hear them, though the far-off sea
Talks to herself and murmurs through your dream
Her endless love, you do not hear, who lie,
One arm over your breast, in careless sleep.

JOHN HALL WHEELOCK, *Aubade*



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Novel Idea

Like a drunkard at a party
To whom nobody wants to listen, the wind
Keeps on drooling over the rooftops.
The long clouds drag long cloud
After long cloud after them.
I lie on a bed, sinking.
To forget the pillow collapsing, the blanket
Pressing, the gas-fire boiling,
The wardrobe waiting, I would like
To be caressed by interminable novels.

JULIAN COOPER, *A Certain State of Mind*

Cold Comfort

" I don't say a word against the Yanks, they're our friends, yours and mine. They're grand guys. But it's a new civilization. They've got a lot to learn. The art of life—that's what we've got to teach them. Good food, good wine."

Madame Houdet here nodded vigorously, " *Mais c'est affreux, ce coca-cola,*" she said.

" And," Yves continued—his gestures seemed to become more exaggeratedly French as his accent became more absurdly American—" the art of love. Why do you think these American dames are so frigid? " he asked Gerald.

Mrs. Portway winced.

" Because," Yves answered himself, " they've never been woken up. Their men don't know how to make love, they just know how to go to bed." He paused, for this was usually one of the most successful remarks in his repertory. On this occasion, for varying reasons, none of his audience responded. "It's not the same thing," he said.

ANGUS WILSON, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*

Soft Persuasion

Take thou of me smooth pillows, sweetest bed,
A chamber deaf to noise, and blind to light,
A rosy garland and a weary head.
And if these things, as being thine by right,
Move not thy heavy grace, thou shalt in me
Livelier than elsewhere Stella's image see.

PHILIP SIDNEY

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BROWN MUD DOLL

They stood in a staring half circle
—red firelight on the black faces

BY ROBERT BOWRAN

ACROSS the river it is black man's Africa. On that side of the bank there are only thatched huts and the timeless dust pathways that have been trodden by black feet since men learnt to walk. And in the rainy season the river flows swollen and muddy and the people make magic on drums or with green twigs of sap-wood to keep the river filled by rain.

The settlement where the white men live clings to the other bank of the river. In the settlement there is a police post and a general store and a Catholic mission station with a stone church, and all around this nameless place there is only the African bush.

The police trooper could see across the river from his living-room window. The window had a mesh fly-screen but no glass. There were shutters outside, pegged back against the dirt wall. He never closed the shutters, even at night.

The police trooper died after sunset and living people in the settlement heard a noise above the murmur of the river . . .

The crash of metal around the general store made Bo Fortunatas sit bolt upright in bed. Bo listened to the river and mosquitoes and harsh crickets. He knew there had been a crash of metal. He knew that for sure.

The Greek storekeeper pushed one hand beneath his pillow and felt better when he touched the revolver. There was brilliant moonlight so that he could see every detail of the gun: butt and grooves and trigger. He watched his wife, then got up quietly, but she did not wake. And the Greek moved like a noiseless jungle cat across the room and all the time he was ice-cool with his thumb easing forward the little black safety catch on the gun.

He stopped at the bedroom door. He thought, " I can't leave her there," so he walked back softly across the room and with his left hand gently squeezed her shoulder.

Christine woke in an instant. She was a pretty girl with merry eyes. Christine said, without rancour, " What is it, boy? "

" There was a loud noise like metal," he answered. " It wasn't the right sort of noise."

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In one movement Christine was out of bed and following Bo to the door. She took a thin blue housecoat from a hook and went with him into the passage joining their house to the store. At the end of the passage a sacking curtain screened the entrance to the store. The curtain moved silently under Bo's hands so that his fingers seemed to rasp against the coarse mesh.

The store was empty. Moonlight shone across the wooden counter on trade goods and spades piled in a heap. The tin biscuit-crates gave back its quiet reflection.

But nobody was in the store.

They moved slowly, always in shadow. Then stood together, knowing there had been a crash of metal. Bo Fortunatas clicked back the revolver safety catch. He began to swear quietly in Greek.

Christine stood beside him. Her eyes took in every detail of the store. Christine came from a farm on the fringe of the tribal territories. Christine Fortunatas knew the four things in life that any farm girl in Africa has to know. She could rock in a saddle and shoot a rifle, she could love her man, and she could read the thoughts that moved behind the impassive face of an African tribesman.

Because she knew these things, Christine stood silently beside Bo, with only her eyes moving. Her hands were relaxed and loose in the pockets of her housecoat but there was a tiny pulse beating at her throat, the way a prize-fighter feels before it begins.

And all the time Christine Fortunatas was thinking that there were many noises in the African night. You did not wake in stark consciousness at any one of them. You never stirred in sleep at the bark of a hippo in the river or at the distant roar of a prowling lion. You did not heed nature, but rather the man-made sounds. In an African sleep you heard the click of a latch or the shuffle of naked black feet or a crash of metal.

She knew Bo didn't scare easily. She watched him where he stood swearing and afraid for her.

They both heard footsteps in the road.

Bo walked quickly across the room. Noise didn't matter any more. He opened the door and stepped across the stoep. Moonlight formed hard black ridges in the folds of yellow dust. He walked to the middle of the road. After the daytime heat the dust was warm against his bare feet. Now he could see an African. Amanda, the houseboy at the Catholic mission station.

In the lingua franca Bo asked him, "Where is your master?"

"The white holy one is at his house."

"It is good he is not away tonight."

"He is there, white man."

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The three stood watching each other in the road. Christine said to Amanda, " Night is a time for sleep. The people in the huts beside the river are asleep. This is not the time for a man to walk along a bush road."

Amanda was sweating; perspiration gleamed like transparent threads on his face in the moonlight. " I heard a noise," Amanda said. " I do not know where it came from, and yet I heard a noise." His face was jet-black. You could tell nothing from his face.

" I thought it a crazed madman's dream," Bo said.

" It was not a dream, bwana."

They stood in the road. There were the night-time sounds and Amanda's breathing and the river and the noise of it. Yet there was nothing.

Bo said, " Come to the mission station." They walked back from where Amanda had come. The mission station was two hundred yards down the road. Father Casey the missionary was standing at the steps of the house.

Bo said, " Did you hear it, Father? "

" I heard it." The priest was a tall man. His skin was burnt copper by the sun. " Sounded like somebody kicking a heap of tin cans, or something falling. Something big and heavy."

Bo Fortunatas wondered how it was that everyone knew something was wrong. And he thought it would be good to see the police trooper and to talk with the police trooper. He said to the priest, " I'll look in on the policeman. Nobody else in town seems to be awake, Liam."

" You tell the policeman to come in for a drink some time," Liam Casey said.

" I'll come-too."

" That unfortunately is to be anticipated," grinned the priest.

Bo looked at him. " Listen, Liam," he said. " Don't go using those long English words at me. I have to think sometimes when you use those long words, see? Suppose I slung off at you in Greek? "

" They taught me Greek in college," replied Casey.

" Classical stuff. See how far you'd get with a dolly in Athens on that attack."

Christine nudged her husband. She said cheerfully, " Just forget the happy ambitions, mate." Liam Casey began to laugh with a deep, rich note.

Bo told Christine, " You stay with Liam, Chris."

" All right," she said.

" You stay right here with Liam."

" All right," she said again.

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Bo walked up the road. He did not watch Amanda and Casey and Christine go into the mission house. He walked fast. Trees loomed grotesquely in the moonlight with their long branches and leaves like daggers.

The store was still in darkness. The front door was swinging open as they had left it. Beyond, the road was unchanged. It was patched with light and shadow. Now he could see the flagpole at the police post. Lamplight glowed from the trooper's living-room. He walked through the grass towards the bungalow. Bo walked carefully because of the night adders that lie in grass.

He shouted, " Charlie! Hey, Charlie! "

Bo looked in through the window. The police trooper was lying near the window. In falling he had brought down a metal filing-cabinet. Drawers had spilt open and there were scattered papers. And somebody had battered the back of the police trooper's head and he had died there on the fibre matting.

Bo Fortunatas pushed forward the black safety catch on the gun. He fired three shots in the air.

He crouched, watching the night, his back pressed against the bungalow wall. The house was surrounded by dark bush. Bo held the revolver between his knees covering the road at the gut height of a man.

The priest ran fast up the road towards the shots. At one time he had played rugby football for Ireland and he was a big man who could cover ground. He passed the store, running with his shoulders hunched the way a player carries the ball. Soon he saw Bo Fortunatas in the moonlight.

Bo walked towards him through the grass. " Dead," Bo said shortly.

Casey looked in at the window. He stood for a long time.

" Better warn the township," Bo said. He was toying with the revolver. Waiting to use it.

Father Casey turned round. " Put it away," he said. " By now they're a couple of miles into the bush."

They went back down the road. The Greek asked if Christine was all right and the priest replied that when the shots came he had sent her to the next house. He had watched her go and when she got there the people had come running out.

At the store Bo Fortunatas went inside, stripping off his pyjamas, to come out again in shirt and shorts and wearing sandals on his feet. Casey stood at the door while Bo changed. Watching the store, watching the bush.

They went on to the township, hurrying to tell the people that a British police trooper named Charlie Mahler had lost his

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life in the execution of his duty. Nobody in the settlement went to sleep again that night.

The night was all blue and silver. Liam Casey the missionary thought of the night and of the men who walked in it. And he thought that in life there are good things that are white like day. Or bad things as black as night. But in between come the twilight things that are neither good nor bad, nor black nor white. And when a man does not know what he is fighting, that is a twilight thing. It is a half-breed shadow belonging nowhere.

And all through the night they considered Charlie Mahler.

In the priest's study there was an oil lamp throwing a yellow glare that filled the room, and throughout the night neither Casey nor Bo Fortunatas nor the fair-haired girl Christine moved far from the range of the lamplight.

Casey said, " You have to look at this thing as if in a book, Bo. You have to ask why it happened and after that perhaps you know it all."

Bo did not look at the priest. " You don't have to ask that question long," Bo replied.

Casey got up. He fetched brandy and three glasses.

He told Christine, " You'd better have one, Chris."

" Pour it," she said.

They drank the brandy neat. Bo always drank the priest's brandy.

" I've been here three years," Liam Casey said. " I've got eleven converts and a case of leprosy reported in time to stop the whole river bank going a rotten white. But that's all I've done, Bo."

" You ain't done so bad," the Greek said.

" It's very bad."

Bo told him, " Have some more of the brandy."

Casey shook his head. In the yellow lamplight he looked old. Casey said suddenly, " You and Christine have been here on the river for most of your lives, Bo. You can talk the dialect the way they talk it in the huts. You know their folk-lore and how their minds work."

He poured Bo Fortunatas another drink. " Now you tell me why it happened," Liam Casey said.

Bo was drinking the brandy. He held the glass tilted back and he was drinking in one long draught but all the time his eyes were watching Casey. Bo put down the glass. It made a dull noise on the tabletop.

" Just another black man's killing," Bo said. " But it wasn't the same as the rest."

He looked towards his wife. She was watching out of the

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window. She was listening to the talk but she was thinking ahead of the talk.

He told the priest quietly, " They hit him with a knopkierie, Liam. You can see that from his head. But you go to the huts by the river bank and you'll find a couple of hundred knopkieries. And then just knowing about the knopkierie won't do you any good."

They sat watching each other. Many crickets made noise in the night but the two men and the girl did not hear the crickets.

Bo said, " Last week a witch-doctor was around the settlement, Liam. You know what happened to him? "

Christine replied, " I can tell you that, Bo. Charlie Mahler the policeman got that witch-doctor by the scruff of the neck and he kicked him right out. The witch-doctor was daubed with clay and feathers and pieces of bark. He was doing a ritual to drive out ghosts."

The priest said, " Half our trouble is the witch-doctors."

The Greek reached for the brandy bottle. He measured out two fingers of liquor into the glass. Then he put down the glass. Christine knew Africa, and if her brain was working on the same lines as his the idea must be near right.

" See here, Liam," Christine said. " You think that because an African wears feathers and clay daubs instead of vestments, and squats instead of standing in a pulpit, the people don't think he's holy? "

Father Casey said solemnly, " The tribes have followed the witch-doctors for centuries now, Christine."

Christine said, " When Charlie slugged that witch-doctor he committed suicide. It's as simple as that, Liam."

Bo Fortunatas drank the brandy in one gulp.

" It was a holy killing," she said. Christine stood up. She walked to the window and stood with her back to the room.

Standing that way, Christine said slowly, " And because it was a holy killing and because it was done with no slashing, you can forget any theory of a large gang of bush boys who just happened along. They would have ransacked the place."

She went on speaking quietly. " This was done by dedicated men," Christine said. " Someone was sworn in for this one particular job. Somebody who respected and feared the witch-doctor."

She turned to face them.

" And that means the killers come from this settlement," she said. " They work in our homes."

Now the night was showing a dawn tinge. Roosters were

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crowing in the kraals by the river, feinting at each other in mock combat, fluttering towards the reed fences surrounding the huts. A weak light laid fingers on the pebbled river bank and on the red dust road and the huts and on the tin roofs of the township.

In the mission parlour Bo Fortunatas stood up. He was stiff and he moved slowly through lack of sleep. He leaned his knuckles against the table. "You think over all that, Liam," Bo said.

Amanda the mission houseboy came in. He stood in the doorway and looked towards Casey. He asked, "Coffee, master?"

Casey said to them, "You want some coffee?"

They said they didn't want the coffee.

Casey told Amanda, "Bring me coffee."

They heard Amanda moving among the clink of china cups. Dawn came fast now in an orange hint and a yellow wash until finally it was day.

Amanda brought the coffee. He turned down the lamp and the flame spluttered before it died. Casey walked beside the table. He thought that in daylight things never seemed so bad.

Amanda was pouring coffee.

In one sentence Father Casey brought them all back to everyday life. "It is the time for confession," the priest said.

Amanda put the coffee pot back on the tray.

The priest told Amanda, "We must pray for the soul of the policeman." He looked at the convert. Amanda had black, limpid, expressionless eyes.

Amanda carried the tray back to the kitchen.

Bo Fortunatas said, "You're wrong, Liam. They won't tell you anything at confession. They won't ever talk about the bad things. They'll tell you the little things, but they won't tell you how they plotted about the policeman in the huts at the river bank."

Casey said, "Amanda will tell me."

The Greek was lighting another cigarette. He dropped the cigarette and the burning matchstick on the floor. He shouted, "And if he did tell you, there would be nothing you could say."

Casey smiled gently. The matchstick was burning on the floor. He walked across to put his foot on it. He was still smiling.

Christine placed her hand on the missionary's shoulder. "You fight it your way, Father," she said. "So long now, and get some sleep if you can through the day."

She walked with Bo to the door and out into the road. The priest watched them through an open shutter. In the new stark

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sunlight he could see them clearly. He thought that there were two tough, brave, clever people.

He walked slowly across the garden to the small stone church. Liam Casey stood in the sunlight, letting it suffuse his face and his whole body, with the cool shadows of the church interior behind him. Flowers in his garden made vivid reds and blues and a little knot of naked piccaninnies were romping in the road, rolling and tumbling over and over each other in the red dust.

Amanda came from the mission house and walked across the garden. Casey looked inside the church and saw quiet black people sitting on the wooden benches. He counted their heads. There were four people in the church. He walked inside towards the shadows and away from the sunlight. He heard Amanda's footsteps following him and then Amanda's footsteps stopped as the houseboy sat down.

Casey crossed himself before the altar.

There was a short plank bench apart from the others. It was here that he always heard confessions. One by one the converts came to him, genuflecting with native grace as they crossed before the altar. They told him little things, of arguments in families and of chickens stolen by moonlight. But they did not mention a knopkierie. He thought, " Bo and Christine are wrong. They are mad; Africa has worked too deeply into them."

He sat on the bench, cupping his ear with one hand, listening to whispered words that told him nothing. Then he said to himself, " No, it is I who am mad. If I do find out, there is no one I can tell about it."

One by one the African converts made their confessions and left the church. Amanda came last. Sunshine made a weak light against the floor and over the altar and on Amanda's face.

Amanda said, " I quarrelled with the man M'nayato. His cattle came in the mission garden, trampling our flowers. I cursed him, calling him the son of a black ape."

" It was a sin," the priest replied. And always he was listening for the killing.

" I took the woman Lilonga to the river bank. I had my way with her and I fear lest her father hear of this thing."

Casey said, " It was a sin, Amanda. You will care for the woman Lilonga and you will be kind if disgrace comes to her."

Amanda looked at the priest. " A confession is secret," the convert said.

Casey felt his spine muscles flicker. He leaned forward. " No word of it can pass my lips," he answered. " That is the oath. In a confession only the altar has ears."

He waited for the killing.

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Amanda said, " The woman Lilonga has a knopkierie in her hut."

The priest did not speak. It was his own houseboy and first convert, but he did not speak.

Amanda said, " The white policeman mocked the witch-doctor. Yet what the witch-doctor did was good, for all men know of the ghosts who dwell by the river bank. Thus it was a bad thing that the ghosts were not smelt out of the dark places. For the ghosts will eat up men and this our people have known since before the river and before the white men.

" So it was agreed that the policeman must be gone from the settlement. I took the knopkierie of the woman Lilonga, and with it I struck the white policeman so that he died. And I think that was a good thing, for the ghosts will be glad in their bellies and only one man has died instead of perhaps three or five or many men."

Between dry lips Liam Casey said, " You are a Christian, Amanda. You do not believe in ghosts."

" The ghosts were the powers of my fathers," answered the convert in a dreamy, singsong voice. " The ghosts belong here and no white man can talk with the ghosts."

Outside, people were walking in the dust road so that Casey could hear their footsteps muffled by dust through the silence of the little church.

Amanda said, " And we have spoken of you in the huts beside the river, white holy one. For you teach of spirits beyond the skies, and this we do not really understand. And you mock the witch-doctors. Therefore the ghosts will be angry and the river will dry up so that the cattle low with shrunken udders and the women wail in the kraals. Therefore you must die."

Casey said aloud in English, " I haven't accomplished a thing. In three years I haven't even understood the ghosts."

Amanda said, " All this I told to the altar." He got up.

Casey watched Amanda leave the church. Then the priest walked to the door. A woman with a baby slung on her back saluted him from the dust road, and in the mission garden Amanda was picking a papaw for breakfast. Over it all, the sun and a warmth and a vivid, terrible colour.

He knew that one day the colour would gradually fade to the shadows of night-time and they would come for him after sunset.

He walked back into the church. He bowed his head and just talked. There was no one else he could tell about it.

The day passed slowly. Bo Fortunatas worked in the store all day. Twice he told the African men sprawling on the

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verandah steps to go away. He did not wish for groups of big, strong men.

In the late afternoon he sat down opposite Christine at a big, old, scratched dining-table pushed against the verandah rail. Bo produced a packet of cigarettes. His cigarettes were always bent and twisted through being in the back pocket of his shorts. He gave a cigarette to Christine. She straightened it in her fingers, wondering how many cigarettes she had straightened since she was married, trying to work out how many more she would straighten before she grew to be an old, old lady. They sat for maybe four, five minutes.

The night was drawing in. You could not see the river any more. And now the sounds of the bush were beginning.

Christine said suddenly, "Bo, do you believe in ghosts?"

"You gone nuts?" he asked her.

"I'm really serious," she said. "I mean the ghosts the Africans believe in."

Bo watched her. "Well," he answered slowly, "I know they believe in them all right. So I have to acknowledge that the ghosts exist. At least here in Africa."

He stubbed out his cigarette, slowly and deliberately. He knew Christine had something on her mind and the thought made him vaguely uneasy. She had a quick brain and a woman's knack of being right. At this moment, Bo needed time to think. He finished stubbing the cigarette; realized too late that he had thought of nothing.

He got up and sat on the verandah rail. Night was falling rapidly, as it does in Africa. He could hear the river now. It sounded louder because of the night and the blackness. Bo wondered what hell was being plotted this night in the huts across the river.

"All right," he said to Christine. "Now you tell your dim-wit husband all about it."

Christine watched the end of her cigarette. She said slowly, "My idea is to beat them at their own game. But I don't yet know what I ought to do. I want to think a bit."

Bo leaned across the table. He said abruptly, "You leave their ju-ju stuff alone, Chris, you hear me?"

Christine looked at him. "This will be white man's magic," she said.

Then she rose quickly and walked into the house. Bo followed. Christine went to the bedroom. She lay down on the bed, flat on her back and looking at the dark ceiling with her hands under her head. "I can think better this way," Christine said.

"Don't you get mixed up in ju-ju," Bo said. Inside his hide

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was a mixture of fear and pride and love. "Don't you get mixed up in this," he said.

Christine closed her eyes. She thought of all she had ever read about witch-hunts and Salem and of all the things they had put in books about European witchcraft in the old days. She knew that somewhere she had once read the very thing she needed to know tonight. For a long time she did not open her eyes.

Then she got up. "Let's go for a walk," she said.

Bo never said a word. He knew when he was licked.

In silence they walked towards the mission station and the river. It was now a bright, warm night. There was not the horror of yesterday.

They climbed the steps of the priest's bungalow. Father Casey was standing at the window. They could see him clearly. And Christine knew that something about him was different.

"Hullo again," Liam Casey said.

There was a new note behind his voice; something she could not place.

Bo and Christine walked into the room, sat down on chairs, looked around for the priest's brandy.

"On the shelf there," said Casey, and Bo helped himself. "You two get any sleep?" the priest asked.

"Damn all," replied Bo.

Amanda made a coughing noise in the doorway. He said to Casey, "Coffee, bwana? or tea?" The priest just shook his head without looking up. And Christine realized that things were very bad in the mission house.

Liam Casey said, "I don't want any harm to come to you or Christine, Bo."

Bo got up from his chair. He corked the brandy bottle and put it back on the shelf. "Even I can't drink tonight," he announced. He snapped at the missionary, "What harm can come to me and Christine in the mission house, Father?" Bo's eyes were narrowed in question. He looked tough. He looked clever.

"Listen," said Casey, "you two stroll around at night as if you owned this place. It's best to sit at home just now. I just don't want you smashed up while you're coming to see me, that's all."

Christine smiled at him. "I wanted to borrow a book," she said.

His bookshelf was built of planks, supported by bricks. "Take your pick," he told her. "They're mostly theological studies. There's a couple about Ireland."

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Christine said distinctly, "I wanted a book on witchcraft, Liam."

Casey looked at her. "I haven't got that," he said. "The Holy Church does not allow us to read that."

Bo stood up. He went to lean out of the window. "I told her to keep out of that ju-ju stuff," Bo said.

Casey told Christine, "A nice girl like you doesn't want to go reading about hideous witches sticking pins in wax dolls moulded to look like somebody and muttering spells so that the victim dies next day."

Christine said softly, "That's what they did, wasn't it?"

"It was done in Ireland," Casey answered. "It's madness, of course."

Bo Fortunatas pulled cigarettes from the hip pocket of his shorts. "Come on," he said to Casey, "let's smoke. None of this is the end of the world."

Casey struck a match. Christine helped herself to a cigarette just in time to catch the last of the flame.

Then Christine said, "We'll go now, Liam. I reckon we're all pretty tired."

"You've only just come."

"I know," she replied. "But we could all of us use some sleep."

Christine and Bo got up. The priest followed them to the door. They stood outside on the verandah. Their cigarettes made red pinpricks in the night.

"Don't you want a book?" the priest asked her.

"No," she said. "You told me all I wanted to know."

Christine and Bo walked slowly back to the store; went in through the house-entrance. All the lamps in the house were brightly lit. There was a lamp in each of the three rooms. They walked into each room in turn. No one was in any room.

Christine was humming as she undressed for bed.

"You're happy now," Bo told her. "You ain't worried like you were."

She sat on the bed in her pyjamas. Her knees were pulled up under her chin. She looked like a pixie with fair hair. She said gently, "Bo dear, tonight by accident Liam Casey told me the one thing I was trying to remember. He told me how to beat this murder fear in our settlement."

Bo sat down on the bed beside her. "I'm only glad you're happier," he replied.

They lay down side by side. They left the lamp burning. Christine said distinctly, "I herewith condemn to death the

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murderer of Police Trooper Charlie Mahler. I don't know who he is, but I condemn him all the same."

Bo muttered, " Ain't we had enough for one night? "

" And I'll execute him," said Christine Fortunatas. " I will kill him dead without even having seen his face."

The night passed quickly. Christine shut her eyes in sleep and then it seemed that dawn light had come. As if there had been no sleep. As if the night had never happened.

In the early morning she thought, " I must wait for night-time. I must do it in the near dark." So she got up, and all day Christine was praying that the unknown would not strike first.

At midday the settlement was still peaceful. The afternoon was sultry and hot.

She felt a quick pulse of apprehension when evening began to push fingers of shadow from the surrounding bush. The shadows lay, black and snakelike, across the verandah. They reared to sudden life when they crinkled upwards against the kitchen steps.

Christine walked into the kitchen. She took a frying-pan from its hook. She stood facing Bo, the frying-pan in her hand. " Get the rifle and come with me over the river," Christine said.

Bo told her, " You're mad, Chris."

" Get the rifle," she said.

Bo held her firmly by the shoulders. He pushed her back against the kitchen wall. Bo said, " Stop it, Chris."

" No," she answered. " This is the time, boy."

He looked at her and then let her go. Bo went to fetch the rifle. She heard a click as he pulled back the breech bolt. He came back with the rifle under the crook of his arm. The breast pocket of his shirt was bulging with cartridges.

Bo told her harshly, " Ask the priest. You reckon that the priest knows."

" He knows but he wouldn't tell us," she answered.

Christine still held the frying-pan. She gripped it tightly and her hand felt hot and sticky and bigger than it really was. She went to the living-room and with one hand rummaged in her sewing-box; then in a moment of exasperation dropped the frying-pan and with both hands took twelve pins from the box. She chose long pins that were bright with big heads and stuck them one by one in the lapel of her dress. She picked up the frying-pan once more and walked out of the house.

Bo followed, silent. They saw no one on the road. It was evening and the white people were indoors and maybe eating. The Africans were gathered among the huts across the river; she had chosen evening because then they would be together, and

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there was enough shadow to bring a man the premonition of the night and fear.

Bo called suddenly, " Stop this game, Christine."

Even the priest was not on his verandah.

A concrete causeway spanned the narrow river. The causeway was lapped by small brown rivulets of water. Bo walked past her, stepped first on the causeway, went ahead of her as they crossed slowly to the opposite bank.

Now night was come. But the fires glowed outside the African huts so that it was not dark there, but light with a red, bad light.

The people had seen them coming. They moved forward slowly from between the huts. Men and women and children in a black, silent mass. The crowd walked forward with no sound. Then the crowd stood between Christine and the huts in a half circle many ranks deep and there was no way through to the huts. Red firelight against the huts. Against the faces.

Bo squatted on his haunches at the causeway end. He pretended not to notice the rifle but they all had seen the rifle.

Christine walked slowly to the brink of the river. She bent down and with her fingers scooped wet brown mud into the frying-pan. The African crowd moved closer. Christine stepped in front of them. Then she squatted on her haunches native fashion with the frying-pan on the ground in front of her.

And she began to model a mud doll.

She worked quickly, with deft fingers. She made a brown mud doll the size of a man's outstretched hand. She modelled the doll from the waistline upwards, and the shape was crude, but in the firelight from the huts the doll looked smooth and living. The flickering red light from the fires made the doll hideous.

At first its face was a shapeless blob of mud. But with her fingers Christine outlined the face of a man and she pressed it in places until there was a nose and squat, wide-spaced eyes. Then with a pin she scraped the lips and nostrils and added the scars that in some tribes are cut into a child's face, and after she had done that the doll was brown river mud no longer.

It became a dark-skinned man.

Christine pushed the frying-pan aside. She set the doll upright on the ground. It was facing the people. The people made no sound.

Christine still squatted on her haunches. She took the pins one by one from the lapel of her dress. She held the pins with the sharp points sticking between her fingers like claws.

Christine spoke in a singsong voice: " The white policeman is dead but his ghost does not walk with the ghosts of the river

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people. It squats in the huts of his fathers, and they are far from here. Yet his fathers are powerful and their ghosts are powerful. For they tell their children to speak across the rivers and the mountains by a magic box and teach them to fly in silver aeroplane birds and these things the ghosts of the river folk do not understand.

" Therefore the white man's ghosts are more terrible than the ghosts of the river.

" Yet now the white ghosts are angry in their bellies because of the knopkierie from the hut that slew the policeman. And the ghosts came to me in the night saying, ' Go, woman, and smell out the devil who made this evil.' And I replied in my sleep, ' Lords, how am I to know the devil-man? For none saw his face and he may be one or many men.' Then the white ghosts replied, ' Make an image of a man from the river and slay it before the people. Then within the space of a sunrise and a sunrise again the devil shall be smelt out so that they who killed the policeman shall be in agony in their stomachs and they shall die.'

" So I awoke and came to the river bank even as the ghost lords bade me," Christine said simply.

She began to thrust the pins through the mud doll. She pushed them through slowly, one by one. " Here shall the agony come," she said, " and here and here."

Now the people were afraid. They muttered and watched the ground. Christine said, " But the great pain will strike in the belly and no man will know from where." She stuck the last pin through the stomach of the brown mud doll.

Then she got up and walked across the causeway. Bo stayed on his haunches, watching the people, waiting until Christine was clear to the other bank.

The people moved back slowly from the doll. One or two broke from the crowd and ran shuffling and silent to the huts. And suddenly Bo realized that not one of the tribesmen would dare to attack him from the rear. He stood up and walked easily over the causeway, the rifle slung loosely from his shoulder by its strap and both hands in the pockets of his shorts. He walked with his head high, wanting to sing and dance and shout in an exultant pride of his wife.

He walked behind her all the way to their house. He would be proud to walk behind her always.

Amanda died the next night. He lay down after sunset and rolled on his stomach and sweated and clawed black fingers against his stomach. He saw strange visions and died afraid.

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This the people expected. These people understood ghosts as only the hinterland of Africa can understand ghosts.

They waited for Amanda to die. They squatted in a patient circle round his hut and if he had not died that night perhaps they would have killed him.

Since she was a little girl, Christine Fortunatas had understood that a stomach-ache springs from devils. She had learnt it from the piccaninnies before she ever went to school.

She sat with Bo in the priest's living-room while Liam Casey told them about Amanda.

"He just lies down and passes on," the priest said. "God rest his soul."

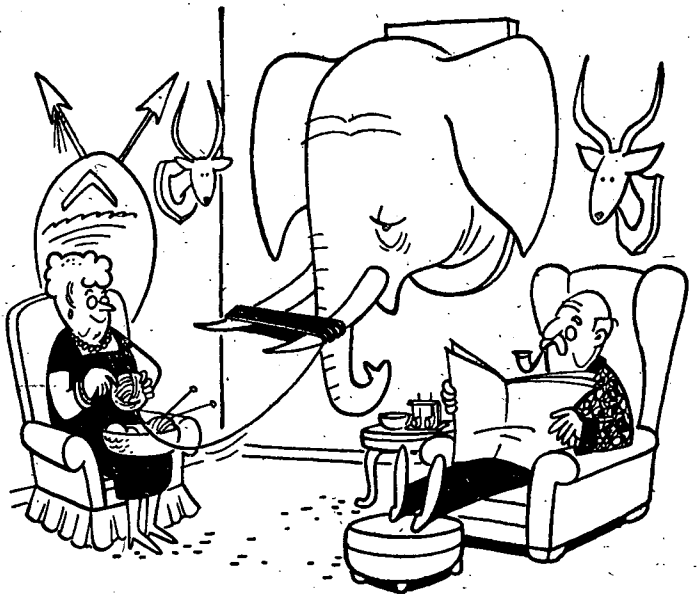
Bo was looking for the priest's brandy.

"There's a new bottle in the kitchen," Casey said. "I'll get it now." He went away.

Bo said quietly to Christine, "That wasn't a bad mud doll you made, Chris."

She answered solemnly, "I left our expensive new frying-pan behind."

"Ye gods," moaned her husband. "Are we made of ruddy money?"



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GREEN FINGERS AT YOUR THROAT

Bramble, wild-rose, and bryony laced apple, pear, and plum tightly together.

BY H. A. MANHOOD

IN the beginning I had more need of a team of demolition experts than a mere jobbing gardener, but a part-time gardener had to serve. I was, I suppose, lucky with the first one, remembering those I've had since.

The site was an abandoned orchard, abandoned, that is, by all except an elderly relative of the late owner. All week this man lived the pompous, busy life of a prosperous solicitor, but at weekends he went back to nature, rather far back, too. He built himself a wigwam out of old linoleum, raincoats, and sacking and called himself Eagle-rod, claiming psychic communication with an Indian chief of the same name. Except when visiting he wore nothing at all except a straw boater against sunstroke and the hop of flies on his bald head.

He entertained small boys in various ways, shot at things with handmade arrows tipped with expensive penknife blades, collected flints by the ton, and ate everything raw with rabbity gusto. He refused to go, claiming squatter's rights, if you please. One obvious course would have been to publish an account, with photographs, of his quaint activities, ruin him by ridicule, but it occurred to me that most of his clients were probably of the same nature and would join him enthusiastically.

Kind by nature, I argued that he'd be bound to crack up of his own accord, sooner or later, and left him for the moment, proceeding with the task of clearing large areas of unbelievable jungle.

The orchard trees had, in the first place, been planted much too close together. They were standards, too. Now bramble, wild-rose, honeysuckle, and bryony laced apple, pear, and plum tightly together. Rabbits, foxes, and domestic cats gone wild had mapped and scarred the sad ground beneath and in the few open spaces bracken was eight feet high.

Fortunately, before despair set in, I was joined by Nelson, a

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cocky, powerful man who'd scrumped apples in the orchard as a boy, boasted interminably of his attractiveness and progress with women and his capacity for beer, but nevertheless did work heroically with axe and saw, monkey winch, and powder gun.

This last was something of a mistake but we got a lot of amusement out of it in a dangerous sort of way. It was simply a powder-filled steel shell; one drove it into a log or stump, lit the fuse, and waited. Sometimes the log was split cleanly into four or five bouncing lengths, at others the gun shot out backwards, high into the air or past one's ear. A great point in favour was that the noise annoyed our Indian squatter, annoyed him so much that he came one day to complain.

Nelson had had his usual two or three quarts of beer and was feeling playful. While the old man stamped and threatened me with a sharpish spear Nelson touched off the already-loaded gun immediately behind him. The old man's false teeth shot out, his spectacles and loin-cloth fell off, and he shuddered apoplectically, whimpering like a biscuit-choked baby, falling flat. Nelson thought he'd killed him and ran for his bike. I went to the tool shed for whisky but when I came back the old man had recovered and gone.

I never saw him again or Nelson either. I put a match to the wigwam eventually and the fire got out of control, romping through the orchard, clearing untouched areas most successfully.

Still needing help, I looked at the cards pinned in a frame outside the village sweetshop. There were half a dozen jobbing gardeners available. I tried them all in turn. They all had elementary notions of gardening and all disliked work. It was as if they had been to a school where laziness and sabotage were taught.

In a sense they had. They were little more than a chain-gang, I found out presently, their earnings mortgaged and escape unlikely. The widow who kept the shop—a sweet-smiling, white-haired dame—was a bookmaker. Men got into debt; she got them out and in again, managing their labour, controlling their earnings with real motherliness, never driving them too hard, making a nice living out of them, but delicately, if you understand. The men were always in employment because there were no others available; they merely changed places every so often. It was a good bad system, but not for me. I looked elsewhere.

In turn, through advertisement and long-distance recommendation I hired a young man who became most odd when the moon was full, an ex-policeman who made notes about every

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damned thing, an ex-sailor who walked as if his knees were tied together and whose experience was limited to stoking on the Isle of Wight ferry and not Cunard stuff as he suggested, and a boiler-suited young woman who quoted bad poetry, wept whenever she cut a worm in half, and actually fed the wild rabbits on the cabbages and lettuces she managed to grow, piling them in secluded corners where the rabbits congregated like boozers at a pub. Working solidly myself through all the comings-and-goings the place became almost tidy.

One character reappeared continuously for years, staying only a week or two, as in a rest-house, camping out, odd-jobbing furiously, chalking details of wages due on doors and the sides of outhouses, receipting door or wall when he was paid with a careful signature, *Jack B. Jones*. He was short and round, excitable and restless and would rather not say what the B stood for.

It seemed that he had clients all over the country, that he was doing them a real favour by apportioning his time among them. I think the B stood for balmy but I did not bother to mention it, merely keeping an awkward job or so in hand against his next coming.

And then I found Duckworth, or rather Duckworth found me. Duckworth really was a gardener. The only trouble was that he was over-fussy and had been in gaol. He was quite frank about the gaol part. He'd embezzled money so that he could start a nursery business of his own. He'd done it clumsily and no particular hurt to anyone if it had come off. But he'd never had a head for figures.

He'd heard that a little thing like that wouldn't bother me at all. What he'd really heard, in a pub, was that I was just a soft fool. He wanted high wages for three days a week, neither more nor less, but said he'd be worth it. He'd got two days elsewhere and that would keep him going nicely. He was getting on in years, and no sense in straining oneself.

I was sceptical, of course, but needlessly so. He worked hard

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and well. The fussiness was occasionally irritating and took odd forms. He disliked litter and was a fanatic on composting. There were compost heaps everywhere, most neat, like graves, and the twiggy stuff that wouldn't compost he burnt, so that there were never less than half a dozen little fires burning about the place.

He spent much time scrubbing flowerpots and disinfecting woodwork and his tools were more spotless than our kitchenware. His labels were written in a wonderful backward-sloping script that was like smoke rolling from a funnel and he kept his seeds in packages made from expensive blotting-paper to make sure that the things breathed right. He drank and smoked fitfully and was swift in contradiction.

But, withal, he was a sensitive gardener, delighting in unusual flowers and vegetables, demanding manure as if it were blood for transfusion to his own children. He pruned, sprayed, and grafted expertly and would often take me by the arm in his eagerness to show me some perfection of growth. He detested only starlings, " they stupid, destructive ones," and he trapped them cunningly, burying the corpses at the feet of favourite shrubs as a kind of gift to fertility.

And then, one morning he did not appear and it turned out that he was dead of heart failure. Knowing what the end would be, he had left instructions for his funeral, flowers and all, and money to pay, tied up in blotting-paper like his seeds. More than that, he'd left a will, leaving his estate—£73, some ancient gardening books, and his tools—all to me, because, in his own words: *The man treated me square and no blame at all as if he had been in prison himself.*

★ ★ ★

ON THE OYSTER

We praise the oyster, cloisterous and true,
Whose normal life's unboisterous and blue.
He chooses not to royster,
And his choiceter be an oyster
Gives him poise the while we foist him on a stew—
Him or missus, much the moister of the two.

Oh, he's smelly, full of jelly, coarse of grain;
But a shelly nonpareilly in the main.
As a worm to vermicelli,
As a Celtic to a Kelly,
He's an oyster from his belly to his brain.
And with six a quorum, may we meet again!

DAVID MCCORD

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DARKENING REEF

He saw with dread the thing
he had been waiting for

BY WILFRED McNEILLY

THE bay was like a letter U, a deep bite taken from the bitter black rock of the coast. Steep rose the hills on either side, deep was the black, angry water. And yet it was good water, for it faced north and drew in the current, swallowing the rich, soupy plankton that came from the ice floes a thousand miles away.

Following the plankton came the herring, and the basking shark, the great Muldoan, straining the water through their gills, drawing out its nourishment. And following the herring came those that lived by the herring; the drifters and the ring-netters, the gulls and the porpoises—and the others.

It was of those others that Michael Kearney thought as he sat on Skull Beacon and scrunched the fine-cut plug tobacco between his hardened palms. He was looking seaward, beyond the mouth of the bay, to the slim white towers of the beacons. Four beacons there were, their bases bedded into the unforgiving rock of the reefs which carried on the bay's outline into the deep water of the open sea.

The eastern reef was the shorter and at low water its jagged back was dry, so that a man could walk to the two beacons to clean the glass and refill the tanks.

But the western reef dried out only as far as the inner light. Between that and the outer light, there was a gap two cables long. To tend the outer light a man had to take a boat, row cautiously through the surf-torn water, watch his moment, then spring to the beacon's iron ladder, and haul his gear up to the platform. In anything like a gale, a man could easily lose his grip and his footing, and die swiftly in the swirling waves.

The pipe stem was between Michael's lean, hard jaws, and the first match caressed the teased-out fibres of the tobacco, when a stone rattled down Skull Beacon. Without turning, he knew Maria was coming.

There was no escape.

"Well?" she said at his ear. "Are ye going?"

He shook his head, pointing the pipe stem. Close by the outer

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light a glistening black back with a meaty scimitar-fin broke the surface. It was like a porpoise back, but bigger. Surely, he thought, surely she can see that it's bigger—the power in it, the evil in it, the hate in it. A salmon skittered across the waves ahead of the fin in a last hopeless bid for life. The killer's fin followed and dipped.

"Feared," said Maria bitterly, "feared of a wee porpoise. Is it a man y'are at all, Michael Kearney?"

His teeth bit into the pipe stem. What was the use of explaining? He had tried before but it was not a thing there were words for, the cold, paralysing chill that the sight of the smooth back struck into him.

Porpoise! But Maria had never seen a killer close up. She had not seen the size of it, felt the power in the boat-length body. A porpoise it might look from the Skull Beacon, but even she would know the difference if she could only look into its eyes, its hate-filled eyes. Orc, killer, swordy—the name made no difference: the little whales were death by any label. He had seen them, like wolves, harry the great Muldoan, the basking shark, ripping huge gouts from his flanks. In his whaling days he had seen them ravish a hundred-foot blue whale of its tongue, plucking its jaws open, swimming in through the baleen screen, ripping and tearing at the soft flesh, leaving the whale to die slowly, for without its tongue it cannot feed.

He had only hated them then. There was more to it now, after the night that had changed him from a good and lucky fisherman to what he had become . . . .

Drifting for herring in the Sound of Mull in his new boat, the *Boy Seaneen*, he had been that night. A night of stars it had been, but no moon. The herring were thick in the water so that they hauled in their mile-long fleet of nets before dawn. A calm, oily swell rolled the boat gently and the nets came in smoothly; Nicky and Pat shaking out the fish into the hold; Malachi folding and stacking the nets; and Paddy Joe at the winch.

No hint of trouble till the second-last net. Then the head rope dipped suddenly and tightened on the winch barrel.

"Muldoan!" yelled Paddy Joe as he sighted the great body tangled in the outboard net. He lifted the axe to cut the rope. The net would be useless for the slime from the basking shark's body would rot the cordage.

From the wheelhouse Michael yelled at him not to cut. "We'll kill him," he called. "His liver will pay for the net." He put the boat astern to drag the shark backwards through the water and so drown it.

The gears had hardly begun to whine when the surface ex-

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ploded in a great shower of spray. A black body, draped in the net, shot skywards and seemed to hang there for long moments.

"That's no Muldoan. That's no Muldoan," Michael found himself repeating.

The water cascaded over the deck as the killer landed almost alongside.

"Cut, Paddy Joe," Michael shouted, "cut, cut!"

Paddy Joe took a step or maybe two steps towards the gunwale. The sea exploded again, and Michael had a brief, incredible glimpse of the killer coming straight towards him. Its jaws gaped, showing the big, wide-spaced teeth and the dark tunnel of its throat. He could see the little, piggy eye set far back on the head and the meaty scimitar of its dorsal fin. He flung his hands up over his eyes.

The wheelhouse rocked and there was a wild drumming on the deck. Michael heard a shriek and the splintering of timber, shouts and a groaning, grunting sort of a sigh. When he took his hands down, the deck was clear.

Not a net nor a coil of rope was left on it. The winch was gone, and so was a ten-foot stretch of bulwark. The hatch covers were gone. Even the wheelhouse lay back at an angle, its whole frame lifted from the deck.

And the men were gone. Where four had stood there now was none. Paddy Joe had gone. Nicky had gone. Pat had gone.

Malachi's head came slowly out of the hold. "In the name of God," he gasped, "what hit us?"

From that day Michael was neither a good fisherman nor a lucky one. In bad weather he would not fish lest he missed the sighing grunt of a killer blowing nearby. In good weather he fished a little—but the sudden hiss of a wave breaking was enough to set him hauling in his nets and heading for home. By night he saw the black scimitar-fins everywhere. By day he watched the line of his nets, anxiously eyeing every jerk of the head rope.

By the end of summer he had to sell the boat. For two years he drifted from job to job; farms, factories, roadwork—he tried them all. But sooner or later someone asked what he had done before, and when they began to talk of fishing it was not long before they asked why he had given it up. And that night the horror would start. His bed would become the *Seaneen*'s deck, and once again the great head of the killer would come hurtling at him, teeth glinting, eyes glaring hate, blow-hole grunting.

One night, two nights, three nights, he would waken screaming with horror, drenched with sweat. And Maria would huddle, moaning, against him. When he could stand it no longer he

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would begin to drink. The nightmare would go—and his job.

There was understanding and kindness in Maria's heart at first. But slowly her patience frayed. There was Seaneen to think of—and she had never seen a killer. Her cousin in the Ministry got the job for Michael as keeper of the lights at the bay. The pay was poor but there was a house. And there was no drink for twenty miles about.

Nor did Michael need drink, there at the bay. There was no one to question him concerning things that were past. He went about his job, cleaning the glass of the lights, filling the tanks with carbide and water—for they were gaslights, the gas produced by the slow trickle of water upon the carbide—and tending the little garden.

Smoothly it went, with Seaneen fattening and browning in the open air and Maria putting on a little weight in spite of having to haul every drop of water from the well half a mile away. Michael felt a twinge in his heart sometimes when he looked across the winter sea and saw the waves foam about the outer light, as if it was the foremast of a boat with her nose dug into swell. But he slept o' nights.

Then came the spring, and the salmon working south towards the rivers of their birth. Following the salmon came the killer.

Michael was in the boat when he saw it. The big can of carbide, safe from spray under the after thwart; the drum of fresh water rolling in the bottom; a whistle on his lips as he headed for the outer light.

Shhh-ungh! . . . Shhhh-ungh! The sleek back arched just ahead.

He saw the little piggy eyes and the scimitar-fin, and the dark mass under the surface. He felt his knees slowly turn to jelly. He threw the tiller over and jammed the throttle open and sent the boat bounding back over the wavelets to the jetty. In his heart there was only wild, unreasoning terror and the memory of the night in the Sound of Mull.

That had been three days before.

He had not gone back to the outer light since. Already the beam was fainter. It had been hardly more than a glow the night before. This night the little automatic striker would click its flint in vain. The valves would open but no gas would come out.

The outer light would fail.

At first Maria had not believed that Michael would really let it fail. She had seen his terror when he landed, and dimly she understood it. But he would get over it. Surely he would get over it in time to fill the tanks again—in time to keep the light burning?

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Urging, pleading, tears, arguments, anger, even blows she had tried. Michael would not go out. Nights of wild horror, when she cowered in the kitchen beside Seaneen, hushing him, stopping his frightened questions.

And now taunts, the last weapon.

"A fisherman ye called y'self," she sneered, arms akimbo, skirt blowing out, filling like a gaff-headed mainsail in the wind. "Oh, a fine fisherman to let the lights go out, and maybe this night a boat coming close in to the coast from the west. Oh, ye'll sleep snug to think o' them come crawling by, hugging the lee of the coast. And they'll see the one light, and they'll say 'tis the outer light, for surely the lights wouldn't fail. And they'll pass close by on the outside of the inner light, and . . ."

"Woman, be quiet!" His voice was soft, but his eyes were cold and his lips were set. With a sob Maria ran down the steep hillside.

Michael sat on, his pipe cold between his teeth, staring out with half-focused eyes over the bay. It was early yet in the year, no boats were likely to come to the bay for another week. By then the killer would have gone, surely it would have gone.

Anguish ripped and tore at Michael's heart, but he could not face the killer. "I canna' do it," he whispered. "I canna' do it."

Sunset was an hour away. The inner lights had already spat their way to brightness. He had filled them at low water, walking over the reef.

They'll see the other lights, he prayed. Surely if a boat comes, they'll see the other lights and understand . . .

But a boat coming from the westward would not see the other lights. A boat coming in under the lee of the cliffs would see only the western inner light and would take it for the outer light —until too late. They would die cursing him, he thought. And it would be right that they should do so.

He did not move. The sun's lower edge dipped under the horizon.

The coughing stutter of his boat starting brought Michael to his feet. The boat was just pulling out from the jetty; Maria, stiff and erect, at the tiller.

"Dear God, she has the boy too!" With giant strides Michael went leaping down the hill.

"Maria—Maria! Will you come back, Maria!"

She did not turn her head. Only Seaneen, sitting in the stern, turned a gleeful face and waved to his father.

Half crazed, Michael ran along the rocky shore, shouting, screaming, begging, pleading. Now he was at the end of the bay

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and only the reef lay ahead. The inner light blinked, and beyond there was the thin back of the reef, now beginning to be washed by the tide.

The tears were streaming down Michael's cheeks, and his voice had no carrying power left in it. "I'll do it, Maria, I swear I will. Come back . . ." he whimpered.

The boat chugged slowly past, towards the outer light. A cable's length ahead of it, Michael saw the thing he had been waiting for. He wondered why it had taken so long.

A dark back rolled slowly over and a scimitar-fin cut the bottom from a wave.

The strength drained from Michael as he saw the fin slowly sink. As it sank, it turned towards the boat.

"Seaneen," he groaned, as the boy waved again. "Maria." The child's cheerful confidence stirred something in Michael. A flicker of pride began to burn in his heart. Maria, so distant and stiff and unyielding, seemed suddenly warm and close. His wife and his son . . .

"*No, by God, you'll not get them!*"

His boots were light as dancing-pumps as he raced out across the darkening reef. Like a dancer, he sprang from slab-edged rock to slimy crag, silhouetted against the sunset sky. Cursing, singing, he bounded swiftly out along the reef, the spray curtaining him as the waves fell, the wind the music for his wild goat dance. His feet were wonderfully sure for his eyes never left the boat.

The tower of the inner light loomed above him and now he was almost level with the boat. "Maria!" he called, command in his voice.

She turned and looked straight at him, from twenty yards away. But the inner light shone in her eyes and she saw only a shadow. She could not see that this was not the same man who had sat on the hill above. Proudly she turned away again, looking out at the dark tower of the other light.

"There's a woman for ye!" he exclaimed. "Oh, there's the girl, indeed." A wild exultation thrilled through his veins as he saw the killer's fin rise, only a little way ahead of the boat. A hazy fire burnt behind his eyes. "The girl, indeed," he laughed as he plunged into the water.

He did not make straight for the boat, for he knew the set of the current as Maria never would. Instead he ran and jumped along the submerged outer section of the reef. Knee-deep, waist-deep, and then at last swimming.

He had calculated well. He found the boat setting in towards

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him at the moment he began to swim. He was closer now to the outer light than the inner. Five strokes and the boat was within his grasp.

Shhh-ungh! The back of the killer heaved up almost at his side. It had come right under the boat. The blubbery skin brushed his leg and for a timeless second he stared into the little piggy eye set so far back on the head. The thing swung slowly round to nose at him and Michael had a last moment of cold fear at the thought of the great jaws.

The gunwale came under his hand; he threw himself over it into the boat. "It's my Da! It's my Da!" crowed Seaneen.

"Give me that tiller, woman," Michael snapped. "Down with ye and take a houl' to the boy."

"The light—" Maria began determinedly, and then surrendered the tiller meekly enough, her heart rejoicing at what she saw in Michael's face.

"With the help of God, we'll tend the light," said Michael. "Now down with ye."

Obediently Maria sat on the bottom boards, making a place for herself and the boy between the tins of carbide and the water-can.

The killer's head rose alongside and it did not dive at once. Michael looked at it. "Dirty beast," he said dispassionately.

Flicking out the heavy iron tiller, he slashed downwards at the whale's snout. The heavy iron tiller was back in the rudder head before the killer fully understood the indignity which had been put upon it. Pain seeped slowly into its skull.

Woo-oomph! Its tail smacked the water and it dived. Two seconds later the whole boat shuddered violently. The bows lifted and the boat slid backwards as the whale humped its back beneath the keel. "Get ready to jump," snapped Michael.

Startled, Maria saw that they were almost alongside the outer light. The bow nudged the iron ladder.

"Onto the platform. Take Seaneen."

As if she had long rehearsed the move, Maria scooped up the boy and swung herself over onto the ladder. Michael stayed in the boat. He had already passed across the water-can and a new tin of carbide when the whale struck. It came on the surface this time, for the rock shelved around the base of the light.

Gape-jawed and as big as the boat, it lashed itself forward. Its eyes glared hate at Michael, its teeth glinted. "The light, woman, the light," Michael called as the killer hit the boat.

She could not turn away. Holding Seaneen, whimpering now, she looked down and saw Michael stagger back with the whale's first impact. The boat's side sprang inwards and water gushed along the seams. The whale withdrew for another charge.

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Maria wanted to call to Michael, to urge him up the iron ladder to safety. Her tongue would not work.

In the sinking boat Michael stood knee-deep, awaiting the whale's attack. In his hand he held the last tin of carbide. Maria saw him rip the lid off. The whale was in no hurry. He did not rush the boat.

Instead, his head nudged slowly over the bulwark, like some giant evil genie from the depths. It was Michael he wanted—only Michael.

Great body slowly writhing, tail forking above the waves, the whale worked forward, heaving itself up and over the gunwale, forcing itself into the boat. Still and intent, Michael waited for the moment when the jaws would gape and reach for him.

Now, he thought.

The part-used can of carbide flashed over and down the killer's throat. Michael swung round and jumped for the ladder. In the same moment the whale jerked forward, all its weight on the boat's side. The timbers crunched. But the killer's jaws snapped, tearing at the edge of Michael's coat.

Michael's hands clutched the iron ladder. For an instant it seemed as if Michael was holding up the killer's weight by his own strength. There was a long moment of horror for Maria. Her eyes widened in panic. The whale appeared to be swelling, monstrous and balloon-like . . . It would engulf Michael, launch, light—everything.

Suddenly there was a soft, flaccid explosion. It blew the killer's belly all away. The great jaws fell open as it slithered backwards into the water. Released from the dragging weight, Michael shot up the ladder. Not looking down from the platform but into Maria's eyes, "The carbide—" he said, panting, "the beast blew itself up."

He swung across to the beacon's iron door. "Woman," he said, "didn't I tell you to tend the light? There's a boat coming up from the west."

She smiled as she followed him into the tiny steel-and-concrete chamber. The light would go on burning, and when the boat had passed safely they would signal to it, to be picked up.

Lightly, so lightly that he, busy, did not feel, she passed a hand across his head.

★ ★ ★

ARGOSY FOR H.M. FORCES

When you have read this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

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GIRL IN A WHIRL

She'd swing at the top
looping like a crazy white bangle

BY NICHOLAS DEE

HER name was Daisy and she was a smasher, the crispest colleen in Killyclancy. Only, as misfortune would have it, old Mr. Mulloon said she was unlucky, he having met her once in the street and gone home to find his finest fowl drowning in a puddle; brandy had revived it, true, but anyway those looks weren't natural, Mr. Mulloon said. Who ever heard of hair like spun milk atop of a pair of eyes black as sloes? Depend on it, the girl was an albinoess, cunningly covering up a pair of cherry-pink pupils with smoked contact lenses. And everyone knew albinos had the Evil Eye.

His croaks of warning were much heeded by the mothers of Killyclancy, and three weeks afterwards Daisy found she might as well look for blackberries in April as find a young fellow to take her to so much as a cheeseparing party. After some rebuffs she began to have a positive hate for the male sex, and never laughed so hearty as when one of the creatures had his car stall on him at the traffic lights, or dropped a bagful of carpet-tacks in the Market Square.

There were two men in the town, though, who took an interest in Daisy. One of them was the doctor. More of him later. The other was Con O'Leary who ran the Housewives' Help Service in the daytime and sang in opera at night. Housewives loved him for the bits of *Traviata* that would come carolling out from under the sink as he scrubbed, or *Trovatore* from the upper storey.

He had a little helicopter from which he used to clean the windows with a long-handled mop, and thus he was in a position to know that old Mr. Mulloon's theory as to Daisy's pupils and the possibility of her hair being a wig was wrong: quite wrong. He had seen her in her bath one never-to-be-forgotten Valentine's eve, and since then he was a changed being; staggered sometimes as he walked, like one in a daze, undercharged several housewives for cleaning down their paintwork, and sang A flat instead of A natural in the middle of *Adelaide*. He was in love, in fact.

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He never missed Daisy's act. Fortunately the variety turns came on before the townsfolk settled to the serious opera or drama of the evening. Made up as Acis, or Don Pasquale, he could watch enthralled as she came onto the stage in her white silk costume all printed over with huge black marguerites.

The Dome of Death, it was called. Leaping nonchalantly on her motor bike, Daisy would whizz round a couple of times to get warmed up on the lower lip of the great aluminium funnel, and then suddenly—flip!—she'd be horizontal, flying round inside it like a fly in a pudding-bowl and slowly circling upwards, little by little, all the time calm and bored-looking as if she were doing the kids' crossword in an evening paper, quite regardless of the fact that one sputter from her engine would drop her twisting down to annihilation.

After a while she'd reach the top and swing there, looping like a crazy white bangle on the twirl round an invisible wrist. Then she'd begin to slow and drop, circling lower, until at last she ran slanting onto the ground in a wide curve. Girl and bike came vertical once more and the engine kicked to a halt. Daisy would bow once to the applause and walk off, wiping her hands on a clean bit of cotton waste, unsmiling.

She never changed at the theatre but slung a dark coat on and went straight home. And oh, the many times that Con would have wished to see her home, and he with only six or seven minutes to his call.

One Sunday though, restless and fretful from his landlady's good dinner, he put on his best suit that was purple as a Pershore plum and went knocking at her door.

When she opened he was tongue-tied and stood like a rock gazing at his bootlaces.

"Well?" she said. She was a grand sight to see, with her hair, just washed, spraying out in all directions like a dandelion-clock, but Con was so tangled up in his intention that he had no eyes for her.

"I wondered if I might," he began, and then he faltered, lost courage, and ended up, "might have left a bucket here last Tuesday week when I washed the distemper?"

"Took you long enough to miss it, faith," said Daisy, ironic. "Well, you didn't."

"Then perhaps," he went on doggedly, "perhaps a bar of yellow soap?"

"Neither yellow soap, nor pink, nor green, nor white," said Daisy. "After I'd paid your ten shillings I had a fine old clear-round getting rid of the muddy footprints of you."

"Then maybe 'twas my stepladder that I've been seeking the

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length of the town?" he suggested, but with despair in his voice.

She took a step back and began to close the door.

"No, wait," said Con in agony. "Perhaps—perhaps you'd kindly consider marrying me?"

She looked him over from top to toe, her eyes fairly blazing with scorn.

"Shall I tell you what I admire, Con O'Leary?" she said, speaking slow and biting. "What I admire most in the world is courage. Look at you, standing there with your white face and your shaking hand. Begorra, there's not an inch of courage in the whole footage of ye."

And this time she did shut the door, and left Con on the outside of it.

Now she was unfair, had she but known it. Though he never went out of his way to show it, Con was as brave a man as any in the town, only for the little matter of the courting. 'Twas common knowledge the way he'd rescued old Mr. Mulloon from the church tower, and him with the drink taken. He was bold as a lion with the housewives, did they try to flirt with him in corners or haggle down his price, and the way he cleaned windows was a wonder to all, jumping over the ten-foot gap from his helicopter to the sill for a final polish, leaving the machine to hover by itself, and then jumping back again with the duster the way you'd be thinking he was a chamois, and no notice taken of twenty foot of emptiness under the soles of his boots. Indeed, he had been given free membership of the Daredevils' Club, though he seldom went to the meetings and thought them great foolishness.

That evening, though, sore and spurned from head to heel, he took a fancy to attend. All the bold young sparks of the town belonged and he felt the need for company. When he got there they were in a fine distraction and turbulence.

"Look what's come in it, will you!" exclaimed Michael Whelan. "'Tis herself, the unchancy one, has sent in an application to be considered for membership. Yerra, what then, at all?"

"Is it Daisy you mean?"

"Ah, 'tis. And a fine misfortune 'twould be for the lot of us did she set foot in the club. Many's the death she'd encompass, whether in the rock climbing or the dirt-track riding or the swimming or the horse-breaking. And a woman, at that! That I should ever live to see the day! 'Tis not to be considered."

"She must have a trial, though," said Danny Mayhew, president of the club. "The rules have it so. A fair trial to anyone applying, they say."

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Con sat silent, for he was unhappy in his mind, while the men discussed in shocked voices what trial would ensure Daisy's failure.

"Look at it this way," said Michael. "Sure, we wish no harm to the girleen, for what's a bit of an Evil Eye when there's goodwill in it? 'Tis how we must be thinking of some grand and terrible exploit will daunt her entirely, the way she'll not even attempt it."

"Ah, sha, he has the marrow of it," said several approving voices.

Danny said, "We could ask her to ride her bike on a tightrope across the Deeps of Kilglore."

"She might agree," Michael pointed out. "'Twould be no unaccustomed thing for her, waltzing over the tightrope the way she do when the Dome of Death's dismantled for the de-rusting."

"But the Deeps of Kilglore, man! She'd never dare. And the river's risen lately, with the deal of rain we've been having. 'Tis a fearsome place."

"Supposing she tried it, and fell?"

"Sure then, wouldn't we have Con here at hand with his grand little broth of a plane to scoop her up like a hurley ball?"

Con was startled, but after a minute he thought, Well, why not? Maybe she'd be grateful then. Maybe she'd run to his arms, crying out, "My hero!" Maybe she'd give up this unwomanish notion. Maybe 'twas not a bad suggestion at all.

The club was unanimous in approval of the plan.

It was a sharp, grey day, the Saturday fixed for the trial. The sky had rained itself out and blown itself dry. Leaves and trees shone with a glitter and heeled over, and a bitter white wind drove a flock of cloud scurrying to the west.

Half the town had assembled near the Deeps of Kilglore for, since Daisy's scornful acceptance of the club's terms, the news of the test had somehow got abroad. To be sure, the club's activities were strictly against the law, but, as the sergeant said, "A bit of a ducking will do the girleen no harm at all, and maybe souse the Evil Eye out of her. And the more souls there is watching, the more to catch her if she falls."

It was a fearsome place, indeed. The club members had already strung a cable across the Deeps, the high gorge where the Kildeggan river arched its back before plunging over the falls into St. Piumail's pool, reputed bottomless. The heavy rains had swollen the river to a torrent and the roar of it would have overshouted Gabriel's trump.

Daisy was as white as a wand but calm enough, as Danny

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Mayhew tested the cable and Michael Whelan helped wheel the bike to the cliff's lip. Con kept himself out of sight, hovering round the windward side of a rock point, for he could not bear the torture of watching her start. The cable ran out across the gorge, slender and silver as a spiderweb, and on this he fixed his eyes.

All at once it trembled, as the web does when the spiderwife's at home, and a moment later the little shining toy ran out and down, more like a raindrop on a telegraph wire than a live creature balancing over death and vacancy.

Con brought his helicopter alongside. He had no fear of startling Daisy for, though he felt he could hear his own distracted breathing, the roar of the falls drowned even the sound of his engine.

Daisy was halfway across now. Just as she began the slow climb to the opposite cliff her bike seemed to slip and stagger.

A sort of a sigh went through the watching multitude as the machine wavered to the right. She brought it back and then, slowly as a leaf fluttering down, the front wheel slid to the left and the bike dangled crossways over the cable for a full half-second while Daisy catapulted head over heels into space and down in a leisurely curve towards the white teeth of the pool.

Con dropped like a stone after her and had her snapped up in his nylon catch-net before she'd fallen more than thirty feet. It was a noble catch. The cheer that went up from the watchers might have been heard from Dublin to Doon Point.

The sergeant hugged Danny Mayhew, Michael Whelan beat old Mr. Mulloon on the back and pulled a black bottle out of his pocket. Only the doctor looked thoughtful as Con pitched his helicopter back to the clifftop.

Con had drawn in his net and now gently let Daisy down to the ground while he hovered; the doctor unloosed her and then Con landed alongside.

"All right is she, man dear?" he called.

He was not prepared for what followed.

"*Oh!* You—you meddling fool!" Daisy stormed at him. "Swooping up like a half-witted hen, you! puffed with your conceit and insolence! Why couldn't you let me fall? That would have been better than to live the laughing-stock of the town, rescued like a sausage spitted by the kind courtesy of the cook. What'll I do now, answer me that? I'll never be able to lift up my head again."

And first she broke out crying, then she slapped Con's face, and then fell fainting to the ground.

"She's dead!" Con shrieked at the doctor.

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"No, asleep," the doctor contradicted. "Shock's all that's in it with her. I'll take her to my home and give her a sleeping-tablet that'll settle her sounder than a babe in arms."

And far from the roystering crowd he took her, though several voices were heard to murmur that a dram from Michael's black bottle would suit the case better and maybe put some cheer into the colleen.

When she woke up she was on the doctor's couch in the doctor's beautiful house, and the doctor was handing her a cup of tea, the strangest-tasting brew she'd ever laid lip to.

"Ah there, poor dear," the doctor said to his sister, "she'll be better in the blink of an eye."

He was a striking-looking man, Dr. Phillimore Madrassi, tall, lean, and black-haired as the devil, with a gleam in his eye. Behind him stood the old-maid sister, Miss Merlwyn, with a flat, square face like the back end of a tin loaf, and a bit of black hair atop, as if the loaf had been burnt. Daisy had the concern on her, looking at the pair of them.

"How are you?" creaked Miss Merlwyn.

Daisy struggled round and sat up. Rare and lovely the doctor's room was, with Sheraton, Chippendale, and Venetian glass, the walls as delicate as a duck's egg and the Persian carpet all dove and rose. But the first sight that struck Daisy's eye was her own feet in sneakers all covered with dust and oil, planted in the middle of this carpet that was worth a queen's ransom. She tried to hide them out of sight.

"Lie down again now, let you," the doctor said. "You're not well enough to be moving yet."

Daisy wanted to go home, but he said no to this. He wanted to study her reactions, he said.

"Fine goings-on!" exclaimed Agnes, the doctor's maid. "Half a dozen boluses and a pint of linseed oil, Mr. O'Shaughnessy, if you please. He sits by her bed, the poor young creature, questioning away like the Judge himself, and she with no more strength to refuse than a day-old chick. All about did her mother shut her in a dark cupboard when she was a gossoon and such-like."

"Is this seemly, Phillimore?" Miss Merlwyn asked her brother gloomily. "Suppose some of our titled patients should come to the house?"

The doctor gave his wolfish grin. "I'll worry about *that* when it happens," he said. "Leave me alone now, my dear, will you, to cure the girl's man-hate on her, and study the grandest case of obsessive fixation and traumatic syndrome it's ever been my lot to meet."

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"Oh, traumatic fiddlestick!" Miss Merlwyn barked angrily. "That white-headed piece has you clean bewitched." And she flounced back to her petit-point.

The doctor sat down again beside Daisy. It may have been his questing his way through the whole of her life, or merely the human talk of a male creature, but devil a doubt she was looking better, the eyes brighter on her and the cheeks pinker than they had been for days.

"I feel sorry for that Con O'Leary," she suddenly remarked. "I'm sorry I slapped his face."

"Ah, never mind him," said the doctor. "I want to try an experiment on you."

"What's that?" asked Daisy, as he strapped a metal band studded with knobs into position on her arm.

"I invented it myself," said the doctor, easy and affable, switching on a battery. "It's a little thing to take the measure of your mood. I want to find out are you still in a state of shock."

In his hand he held a dial with a needle that jerked and flickered and now, keeping his eye on it, he reached and kissed Daisy's cheek. She didn't twitch an eyelid. The needle moved slowly from thirty to forty.

"Still some shock present," said the doctor professionally, making a note. "We'll try again."

This time he kissed her on the lips and the needle rose up to sixty.

Meanwhile old Mr. Mulloon was feeling ill at ease. True, Daisy had put the Evil Eye on his hen. True, O'Leary had been ready to rescue her so no great harm had been done, but had it been right, he asked himself, to smear axle-grease quite so thickly on that cable? He very much feared not.

Seeking guidance on the matter, old Mr. Mulloon returned to the Deeps of Kilglore and sat brooding on the cliff. Maybe some means of atonement would come into his head.

The season's heavy rains, washing and washing down the falls, had ended by turning St. Piumail's pool to a whirlpool that swung and turned like a great cone of black glass beyond the dizzying roar of the waterfall. It was a wonderful thing, a thing of portent.

Gazing at it, Mr. Mulloon observed something going round and round, and after a minute he recognized this as Daisy's motor bike.

"All her livelihood, the poor colleen, God save her," he said, shocked. "Maybe if I climbed onto that rock and leaned out with my crooked stick I could fetch it to land."

"Holy mercy!" exclaimed Daisy. The pointer on the dial

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leapt and quivered at a hundred and twenty and she fetched the doctor a clip on the ear. Agnes, listening at the keyhole, decided it was time to intervene.

" Doctor, Doctor! " she cried, bursting in—and wouldn't this make a grand tale for the town—" old Mr. Mulloon's fallen himself into the awesome great whirlpool! Half the town's up at the pool of Piumail watching the poor man spinning round out of reach, and he the innocentest creature that ever breathed a word of malice in Killyclancy, bless his evil, drunken old heart."

While she spoke she eyed with interest Daisy's scarlet cheeks and furious eyes. The girl was struggling to free herself from the doctor's contraption.

" You're cured," he said hastily, rubbing his ear. " Stay here quietly till I get back. Another night under sedatives—"

" I'm coming up to the pool," said Daisy, and strode past him to the door.

Up at the pool of St. Piumail the townsfolk were gathered again. There had not been so many free spectacles since King Conor's dairy show and the events leading up to the war of the Dun Cow.

Old Mr. Mulloon went round and round, quite self-possessed —someone had thrown him a bottle of the stuff tied onto a piece of cork—but he was getting lower in the whirlpool all the time, and when he reached the bottom, what then?

" He's done for," said the doctor, staring down the long, black glass slope at the little foreshortened figure so far below. " Nothing can reach him down there."

" Yes, it can! " cried Daisy. " Who'll lend me a motor bike? I'll go down for him myself! "

And before anyone could cry, " Stop! " she had grabbed Danny Mayhew's Smith-Rivers, kicked it into life, and plunged onto the lip of the whirlpool.

" Daisy! " shouted the doctor angrily. He had not planned to cure her for this.

But already she was swinging round, vertical to the glossy slope of the water, calm and debonair as ever in her act, and all the time going lower and lower in pursuit of Mr. Mulloon who sat below her as if in an armchair, gazing up with a disbelieving expression on his face.

She leaned over, she grabbed him, she dumped him behind her on the pillion.

" Isn't it a wonderful thing," he remarked to himself. " Seized up by the scruff, the way she'd be young Lochinvar coming out of the west. Eh, it's a wild age we live in."

For the spectators above, though, it was plain that the weight

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of two riders was going to be too much for the aged Smith-Rivers. Daisy herself realized this and tried to coax more speed from the flagging machine. No use. Her despairing glance flung up, and then fixed. Overhead, calmly unloosing his catch-net as if this were old routine, was Con O'Leary, dropped as far down into the whirlpool's maw as the spread of his rotors would allow.

"Holy Pate," said the people of Killyclancy, "he'll save the pair of them yet. Ah, it's the grand lad he is, entirely. Watch him dangle for them now, 'tis as good as bobbing for apples. Wurra, he's missed. Try on the next round, boyo! Cunningly does it, the way the monkey caught the alligator's tail. Ah, he's got them. Now, will she be dealing Con another of thim great tempestuous slaps? 'Twill be a gradle thing to see."

But in this respect the onlookers were disappointed. Dropped from the helicopter, Daisy did not wait for Con's cautious approach. She disentangled herself from Mr. Mulloon, rushed on Con with open arms, enveloped him in a smothering hug, and cried out, "My hero!"

In the background the doctor scowled, defeated. His cure had been successful, but he was not the man to appreciate it.

★ ★ ★

RESULTS OF ARGOSY COMPETITION

Competitors were asked to furnish us with a pen-portrait of their conception of the typical Argosy reader and so it was perhaps illogical to hope for something exotic and off the beaten track. Nevertheless we were a little disappointed at the composite picture presented, which contained more commuters than six-shooters. A guinea apiece to Mrs. A. M. Whillock, Honor Oak, S.E.23, whose ruefully resigned ratepayer secretly sees himself a swashbuckler, and to Pat More, Newdigate, Surrey, whose Rabelaisian reader is owned by an understanding dog. Half a guinea apiece to Miss W. Riley, Tresco, Cornwall, and Miss Lily Winthrop, Randolph Avenue, W.9.

SOLUTIONS to INQUIRE WITHIN on page 31

1. *Jericho; the world's largest open-air theatre at Hollywood.*
2. *Spencer Perceval, killed May 11th,* 1812.
3. *California; the English Channel; Henry VIII, so called because he debased the silver coinage with copper.*
4. *The old calendar was the Julian, the present is the Gregorian.*
5. *Both are terms for April Fools, one Scottish, the other French.*
6. *Edmund Burke.*
7. *Instituted* 1829; *made annual in* 1856; *Cambridge.*

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I'm agoin' to seek her, fur and wide

CHARLES DICKENS,
David Copperfield

Come you not from Newcastle
Come you not there away?
O saw you not my true love
Riding on a bonny bay?

Why should not I love my love?
Why should not my love love me?
Why should not I post after her
Since love to all is free?

Traditional

Secular Letter

"I ought to get a poem done for this evening's courier."

"For the Queen of Flanders' daughter?"

"That's the very girl. I say, you are a knowing chap . . . It's the rhyming," said the King. "That's what does you every time. Now whatever can you rhyme with Flanders?"

"Difficult, one observes."

"Goosey, goosey, ganders?"

"Too secular."

"It is secular, isn't it, what? That's what I thought myself, when I was making it up."

"You couldn't say," asked the King, continuing, after deep thought, "you couldn't say:

Dear Daughter of the Queen of Flanders
How I wonder where your goosey wanders?"

"Is this distinguished lady in possession of many goosies?"

"Not a single one. That's what makes it so difficult."

T. H. WHITE, *The Witch in the Wood*

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Where is Sylvia?

Sir.—I met a friend in Paris during the last summer. She was an English. This friendship is very important for me; that is why I write you my problem. I lost her address in Naples on the way of Turkey. Now I know that she is in London: she had told me this in Paris. I know nothing about her except the name. Her name is SYLVIA IVY ANDREWS. I know nobody in London whom I knew before, to write and ask his help. So would you like to help me? If it is impossible, can you write me something to solve this problem?

Excuse me as I gave you such a problem, trouble. Thank you very much. Sincerely yours,

ULKU BASSOY, *Ankara, Turkey,*
Letter in The Observer

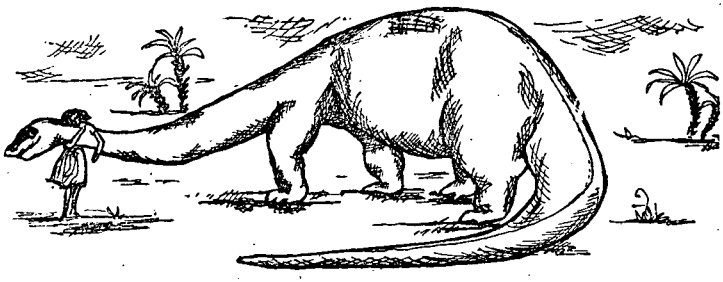
Out of Dokus

And have you seen my Dokus egg, my lovely hocus-pocus egg?
I've burrowed in the green hills and hunted on the plain.
If only I could scratch him out and in the sunshine hatch him out,
Me and Dippler Dokus we would never part again.

She wropt him in a leather shell the colour of a heatherbell
And laid him in the grass a many million years ago.
Unmindful of the breed of him she took no further heed of him
—Did e'er another mother serve a Dippler Dokus so!

I'd dearly love to do for him, to cook and clean and stew for him,
To fight and bite and chew for him until he cut his teeth.
I'd close his honey-coloured eyes with Dippler Dokus lullabies,
For oh, though he is plain on top, he's speckled underneath.

GERALD BULLETT, *Remember Mrs. Munch*



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MURDER MY SHADOW

By HOLLY ROTH

ALTHOUGH the police station was a dank and cheerless contrast to the pleasant, sunny street, it was, at first, a relief to Dell to have arrived there; just as it had been a relief when the policeman had at last shouldered his way through the mob at the scene of the murder she had witnessed. But the authority represented by the officer's blue uniform had not been reinforced by the efficiency she had dimly expected.

They had stood interminably at bay before the crowd, she and the policeman. He had grated out the old clichés, "Break it up," and "Move along, now," but the crowd had milled and eddied, flowing back a step and then forward. The police car had been long in getting there, and when it did come, there had been discussions and delay. Altogether, she must have leaned against the cold stone pillar in front of the apartment house for fifteen or more minutes before being ushered, not too gently, into a car and driven to the police station.

And now the relief she had at first found on arriving was gone. It was almost one o'clock by the institutional-looking clock high on the wall over the raised desk. She had given her name and address, marital status, business address, and such standard data, but for the past quarter of an hour she had sat, alone, ignored, on a hard, uncomfortable bench in a corner of the big, barren room.

She was fumbling towards a decision to take matters into her own hands, to do something, anything, to break the long wait, when one of the uniformed men strode over to her, said, "This way," and grasped her arm. Before she had made up her mind to protest he led her through a door, into a very small room.

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TENSE NEW SHORT NOVEL

The room contained a desk and two chairs, and the single window opposite the door was barred. A man in a brown suit sat in the chair behind the desk. The uniformed policeman guided her to the chair facing the man and then left. There was silence while the man at the desk filled in blanks on a large pink form.

He was a thick man, heavy-looking but, she estimated, not tall. He was hunched over the desk in such a way that all he presented to her was a foreshortened oval of sparse iron-grey hair.

He spoke his first words without looking up. His voice was harsh. "Your name?"

"Dell Kenlon."

"Your *real* name." He peered up from under heavy eyebrows and disclosed a thick-featured, impassive face, with small, intelligent-looking, disagreeable eyes.

"That is my real name."

"All right, then, put it this way: give me your full name."

Dell said, "My full name is Dell Harrington Kenlon."

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He looked at her expressionlessly for a minute and then said, "What does Dell stand for?"

"I was christened Dell, just Dell," she said evenly.

"We'll leave it for the moment. Your age?"

"I've answered these questions outside—"

"Answer them again." There was a tone in his voice that puzzled Dell—something she couldn't put her finger on.

"Your age?" he repeated.

"Twenty-six."

"Married or single?"

"Widow." She knew what was wrong now: although abrupt, coldly impersonal on the surface, his interest was personal, avid.

"What were you doing five streets away from the address you gave the officer at the desk as your home address?"

"What was I—?" The question was ridiculous, but she found it difficult to phrase her resentment. She said, "Is there some law forbidding me to leave my house?" But he didn't look up, and she found herself answering his question as if there were just such a law. "I was going to visit my mother."

"Do you work?"

"Yes."

"Well? Well?" He tapped the pencil on the desk and looked up impatiently from under the iron-grey eyebrows. The fact that he hadn't sat up or raised his chin was insulting, as if he hadn't considered her worth that much attention.

She sat up straighter and spoke distinctly. "I am a model at Meller and Streiss, on Seventh Avenue."

"A model," he repeated, and smiled for the first time. She wished he hadn't. "And you live alone. What do you model?"

Indignation brought Dell's numbed senses to life. In a rush she became again all the things she had been before eleven-thirty-five that morning. The door behind her opened, but she paid no attention to it. Her knees suddenly regained full muscular control, her mind was clear, her emotions were concentrated in the one overwhelming sensation of anger.

She stood up and spoke slowly and clearly, "I model dresses—high-necked dresses. Anyway it's none of your business. You're supposed to protect—not insult me. It's up to me to ask questions, not you. What happened? Who was the man who was killed? And"—it hit her with sudden force—"why haven't you asked me the important questions: what I saw, if I saw the man who did it, if I could identify—"

A voice behind her said, "All right, Orcutt."

She half turned. A big man in a tweed suit was standing in the doorway behind her, holding the door open with a clear invitation. He repeated, "All right, Orcutt. That's enough."

The two men stared at each other for a full, deadlocked minute. Then Orcutt rose and moved round the desk. He chose to go round the side on which Dell was standing, and so had to brush past her to reach the door. It was a deliberate gesture.

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Then he was out of the door, and it had closed behind him.

Dell measured the big man frigidly. She said, " I'm leaving. Please get out of my way."

" Mrs. Kenlon, I'm sorry."

" I don't care how sorry you are, I've had enough. I'm—"

" Will you listen to me for just one minute? "

It was a pleasant voice—clear, even, intelligent—and a pleasant face, too. His eyes were slightly slanted, and the resultant wrinkles were disarming. His mouth was big, full-lipped but firm, his nose was straight and rather small, which gave him a boyish look.

As she hesitated, he went on, " We owe you an apology. You shouldn't have been kept waiting, but it took a little time to identify the dead man, and we always have a vast amount of red tape to go through. If you'll just tell me what happened, as briefly as you like, I'll tell you what we've discovered so far."

They were the first intelligent words she had heard in almost two hours. She said, " All right," and then, still standing, with one hand on the chair's back, she began to tell the man about her morning.

She told it in brief, competent statements of fact, but as she spoke something of the emotional impact of the experience came through. One moment life had been routine, a little dull; the next three minutes had transformed it into melodrama. And when the whole world changes and the familiar landscape is gone, can one be sure that beneath the surface things are as they were before?

It had been like every other Sunday morning in Manhattan in the spring, but Dell Kenlon wasn't used to being out at that hour, and it was a novel experience to see a New York street, even a semi-residential street, so quiet, so deserted. The city, she realized, had split into two groups, the churchgoers and the loungers. Those who weren't in church were still in pyjamas. She normally belonged to the lazy group, but the lovely day had beckoned her out into the fresh, warm air.

Now she was almost at her mother's door and she was too early, since her mother was a churchgoer; but Dell had a key and had decided to surprise her mother by having a cup of tea all ready for her when she returned.

As Dell rounded the corner and came abreast of the first of two enormous, dirty stone pillars that stood sentinel at the entrance to her mother's block of flats, there was a sharp, rather loud sound. Something swished behind her left ear and then seemed to glance back and streak across her face. Her head was jerked by her surprise to the left, and there, on the edge of the pillar beside her, was a fresh white gash in the dirty grey.

Momentum carried her one step forward beyond the stone pillar and gave her a clear view, up thirty feet of drive, to the massive doors of the building. Very near her, coming towards her, was a man, a shortish man, who had apparently just left the house. There was nothing unusual about him except that at that moment he sank

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to his knees, seemed to stare at her, and then fell forward at her feet. Confused with his falling were three more of the loud sounds.

Dell took a step backward, away from the man's outstretched hand, and bumped into the pillar. She put her right hand behind her, flat against the cold stone, and, using the hand as a rudder, turned slowly round.

There, across the street, standing in the doorway of a radio repair shop—closed, of course, on Sunday—was the man she had suddenly known would be there.

His left hand was on his hip; in his right hand was the gun; and curling gently away from the shadow of the doorway out into the sun was a little twist of smoke. One of his feet was pointed, toe down like a ballet dancer's, off the low step leading to the shop. His hat was on the side of his head, and the brilliant sun was shining almost directly on its brim, so that his face was half in shadow.

She had only the briefest glimpse of his face, under the brim of his low-pulled hat, but she could tell he was looking directly at her. They stood there, hypnotized for a moment, and then came the sound of running feet. He put the gun into his pocket.

She glanced at the watch on her left wrist: it was eleven thirty-eight. She looked up immediately, but in that moment the man had disappeared, or had been swallowed up by the crowd, since the quiet street was filling with people, and the stillness was being replaced by the bubbling sound of voices.

She had closed her eyes and stood immobile, trying to adjust herself, to bring back the quiet Sunday morning, or understand where it had gone, but when she opened her eyes it was to the shock of too many faces too close—curious eyes, a mass facial expression she had never seen before, a naked look with herself as its target. She tried to disentangle the faces, but they were all strangers.

She was alone before the crowd.

She might have tried to say something, to communicate, but the mob had an odd trick of seeming to talk to itself. Its members asked each other questions as if she weren't there, and her sense of isolation grew deeper.

When, finally, she saw the blue uniform of the police, she had been grateful . . .

The big man in the tweed suit had listened with evident sympathy. When she finished, " And then they brought me here and I sat and sat—" he distracted her from her mounting sense of panic by interrupting.

" Well," he said in a matter-of-fact tone, " that's all very clear. Now, to answer your questions, the first shot ricocheted off the stone pillar. That was the swishing sound you heard. The bullet traced a triangle, with you inside its acute angle. The next three shots all hit the man for whom they were intended. Now, you saw the man who did the shooting? "

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Dell let her mind go back to the sunny street. She described what she had seen, and the impressions she had formed.

"All right, I see," the detective said. "He was nice-looking, comparatively young. Thirty, would you say?"

She hesitated. "About that."

"Yes. Grey suit, grey overcoat, grey hat with black band. Regular features as far as you could tell. Brown shoes, you think. And middling height."

"I know his shoes were brown because I noticed one as it hung off the step. But I'm not certain about his height."

"But you couldn't see his eyes, you didn't notice the colour of his tie, and you don't know what kind of a gun it was."

"Mr.—" She paused.

"Keeley. Lieutenant Keeley."

"Lieutenant Keeley, I'd never seen a gun before. Never. How could I—?" She stopped because he was smiling. It was a smile with real amusement in it and, without understanding its cause, she found herself smiling with him.

He said, "We deal with so many people who are very, very familiar with guns that it becomes difficult to realize that the majority of New Yorkers have never seen one close to. Would you recognize the man, Mrs. Kenlon?"

Dell hesitated. "That's hard to answer," she said finally. "I have a clear impression of him standing there, with a gun in his hand. But if he were simply to pass me on the street, I'm not so sure. He looked so—so ordinary, somehow."

"Well, that makes sense."

He moved away from the door, round the desk. "Sit down for a minute," he suggested. He waited until she was seated before he sat down behind the desk. "Let me explain something to you."

He sat squarely in the chair, staring down at his large, competent-looking hands. When he looked up his face was very earnest, and the wrinkles around his eyes were less noticeable. The eyes themselves were revealed as pleasant, warm.

"We think we know who fired those shots, because of the history of the dead man. Your description of the gunman tends to confirm our opinion. If we can put our hands on him you will probably be able to identify him. But if you are *not* able to identify him, we can be as certain ourselves as we could wish, and we still shan't be able to arrest him. And if he can't prove where he was at eleven-thirty-five—what then? A jury would decide, and rightly, that thousands of people couldn't prove where they were at exactly eleven-thirty-five on Sunday morning. So you see . . ." He seemed to run out of words.

Dell wasn't sure she did see. He obviously wanted something from her, but what? "If I can identify him," she said earnestly, "I will. I wouldn't be afraid to, if that's what you mean."

"Well, that isn't exactly what I mean. You see, he saw you, too. He's probably not a stupid man. I don't think he'll miss the obvious fact that you are a—a threat."

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She felt the terrible unreality coming back over her. "Do you mean that he'll try to—?"

He spoke quickly and reassuringly, "Well, it's very unlikely. First of all, it would be dangerous for him to try it. Simpler, of course, just to get out of town. And, anyway, he doesn't know where to find you. You say no one in the crowd knew you. That's a piece of luck. You just stay away from your mother's house, and you should be in no danger. To be on the safe side, don't discuss this with your mother or anyone else. That'll take restraint." He measured her with his eyes and added, "But I think you can do it.

"I really don't think you're in danger," he repeated. "I just felt it would be fairer if you were aware of all the aspects of the situation. Now"—he stood up—"you go home and get some rest." He smiled sympathetically.

She got up and preceded him to the door. There she turned and asked, "But who was the murdered man?"

"His name was Sedgley Mathias. He was once a police detective."

"Oh. And who do you think killed him?"

He hesitated. Then he said, "Well, we think it may have been a man named Orcutt, William Orcutt."

She said, "Oh," again, but as he reached for the doorknob she drew back, blocking his way. She motioned at the desk. She said, "But that man—"

"Yes," he said. "William Orcutt is Lieutenant Orcutt's brother."

When they reached the door, he touched her arm, stopping her. "Down the hall," he said, "the room on the right will have some reporters in it. I'll handle them; you had better say nothing. Don't be nervous. There won't be a mob, just a few men."

As they moved down the hall and started past the open door on the right, a man called out, "Hey, Lieutenant! That the witness?"

There were three men in the room. One was elderly and untidy; one was middle-aged and dapper-looking; the third came nearest to the traditional reporter on the films, except that in addition to being young and good-looking, he was extremely well dressed.

Keeley turned slowly round and stood in the doorway. His bulk almost filled the opening, and very little of Dell was visible to the three men inside. Keeley said to the dapper-looking man, "Yes, Dunn. This is the young lady."

"What's her name, Lieutenant? Come on in."

Keeley said, "No." Dell couldn't see his face, but his tone, crisp and professional, sounded very different from when he had been talking to her.

"Look," he said, "I'm not one for boloney. And I'm never one for dramatics, and I'm not going in for them now. I'll leave it to your common sense. This lady is the only one who can identify the

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killer. Her name and address in the papers would tip him off. Everybody knows that the penalty for two murders is no greater than for one. Get it?"

There was a pause. Then Keeley added, "Now, I'm sure no one is going to try anything silly. It would cost you your jobs, in fact, since no editor wants blood news. But in case you talk in your sleep, I think it's just as well you don't know her name or address." He moved aside so that they could see Dell.

The dapper man said, "O.K. Wish you luck, honey." The old man looked bored. The young man looked very much interested.

Keeley piloted Dell away.

Outside, on the stone landing at the top of the four steps leading to the street, Keeley stood still and looked uncertain.

She said, "Thank you, Lieutenant. I may go home now?"

"Yes, Mrs. Kenlon. I—I'd like to take you, but I'm—"

She was surprised. She hadn't expected the offer, even the negative offer, and he looked flustered. He had been very self-contained up to that moment. She thought again that he had a pleasant face.

She said, "Thanks just the same, but I'll be fine. I'll take a taxi."

"There's a rank at the next corner."

She started towards the steps, then stopped. "You'll get in touch with me?"

"Certainly. I'll phone you. That is, we—" He stopped.

She said with amusement, "Thank you, Lieutenant."

The street was still sunny and warm, and the world was probably the same as it had always been. She walked quickly towards the corner. She would go home, phone her mother, have lunch, and take a nap. Then she would try to see her morning in proper perspective. Perhaps if she stood back from it, it could even be made to seem exciting.

She stopped dead. A man with a shock of fair hair had leapt out of a car a few feet ahead of her and, in a lightning gesture, had planted himself directly in her path. He was aiming something, aiming—

There was a click, and Dell, fighting against the first threatened faint of her life, reached wildly for something to hold on to. Surprisingly, there was a hand beside her and an arm supporting her shoulders. She rested against the arm and fought the blackness.

A voice over her shoulder said, with restrained fury, "Peters, can't you ever get a camera shot without scaring people to death? What are you playing at? Anyway, we can't use pictures."

The arm turned Dell gently around. "Are you all right?"

Dell looked up into the worried eyes of the good-looking young man who had been in the reporters' room. She struggled to say she was all right, but shock upon shock had been too much. She didn't seem able to speak.

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"Peters, open the rear door. Here, sit down in here. Get your breath."

He guided her into the car, and she rested her head against the back of the seat, while he, rather pointlessly, she thought, rubbed her hands between his. His face was full of concern.

After a minute she managed to say, "I'm really all right. It was just that on top of the other—"

"Sure, I know." He looked relieved. "We'll take you home."

"I can get a taxi—"

He waved an airy hand. "Not a chance. Come on, Pete. You drive."

The cameraman pulled his shock of hair out of the back window and got into the front seat. He shot Dell a penitent glance, but all he said was, "Where to?"

She gave him her address and then relaxed against the back of the seat. There was silence while they pulled away from the kerb, and then Dell said, "I'm really sorry to have caused such a fuss. I—"

"All Pete's fault. You must have had quite a morning."

"It has been rather upsetting. You're one of the reporters, aren't you?" At his nod, she added, "Is it hard on you not to get all the details of the story?"

He laughed. "Well, a little, but I'll survive. No one is going to hold me responsible, anyway, because I usually do features. Sunday-paper stuff, you know."

The cameraman spoke up, prompted, Dell decided from his tone of voice, by simple hero-worship. "I don't know what it's all about, lady, but no pictures, and now you say no story. It must be killing him. He's got a name for showing up the cops. If he can't say nothing, Jim'll die."

The reporter laughed again. "I'll try to hang on," he said. "But thanks for the build-up."

At her door, he handed her gently out of the car and then, standing on the kerb beside the open door, asked, "You'll be all right?"

"Fine, now. And thanks for the lift."

"That's the least we could do. I'll phone later, if I may, to find out if you're really O.K." The "if I may," she decided, was mere terminology.

He turned towards the car door and then back to her. "My name is Barlow. Jim Barlow. And yours?"

"Dell Kenlon."

She paused and then added slowly, "You weren't supposed to know that."

"Oh"—the hand-wave came into play—"you heard Keeley. I wouldn't dream of using it. But I wouldn't be able to get you on the phone unless I knew your name, would I, Miss Kenlon?" He smiled, showing white teeth.

And Dell suddenly felt that he was more than good-looking; he was startlingly handsome. She said, "Mrs. Kenlon."

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His pause wasn't an instant long. He said quite smoothly, "Well, then, Mr. Kenlon will be taking care of you, won't he?"

She said slowly, "No. No, he won't." She turned and walked up the steps of her little converted apartment house, leaving him on the pavement, hat in hand, looking puzzled.

At eleven that night, even though she had had a two-hour nap in the late afternoon, Dell was more than ready for bed. She was feeling better, almost normal, but very tired. As she went through the routine of getting to bed she found herself thinking of the two men, Barlow and Keeley, as a study in contrasts. The reporter, slender, handsome, and very engaging. The lieutenant, square, solid, shy—and very engaging.

She went from room to room closing the windows. Most of them were actually doors, great plate-glass panes set in wrought iron, extending from the floor almost to the lofty ceilings, and opening onto miniature balconies.

She loved the apartment—its big rooms, its high ceilings, and its beautiful floors. It was, of course, too big for a woman alone, but she and Max had lived in it and loved it, and she had long before given up the struggle with her conscience, which told her the apartment was a ridiculous extravagance.

She went into the kitchen and, leaning against the long white-wood cabinet Max had built in, drank a glass of milk. Then she took the paper bag of rubbish out of the garbage bin and went to the backdoor.

Laced to the rear of the house was what, in mundane terms, could be called a fire-escape, but for beauty and convenience it outdid any fire-escape ever built. Made of delicate and graceful wrought iron, it was sturdy and wide, and looked like a part of the old house, not a last-minute appendage. It was used as a tradesman's entry for deliveries.

On summer evenings she and Max had sat on its spacious platform, and looked down into the beautiful, overgrown garden that ran the length of the street at the back of the houses; one of the many hidden Manhattan gardens that out-of-towners never know exist. In this case, the tenants had been wise enough not to partition the ground into little rectangles.

She put the rubbish in its outdoor receptacle, disguised by Max to look like a garden-tool box, and then stood looking dreamily down at the dim garden four storeys below. Something white at her feet caught her attention. She realized it was the paper, delivered that morning and ignored in the confusion of the day.

She bent to pick it up. There was a report, and then, beside her, the now-familiar sound of a bullet biting into stone.

Dell threw herself flat on her stomach. The iron was cold. I wonder if I was in the apex of *that* triangle, she thought, almost dreamily. The next one . . .

The realization that there might be another bullet brought a sudden, urgent clarity to her thoughts. There was no way into the apartment except through the kitchen door. The only light on

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in the kitchen was the concealed strip under the wall cabinets, but that was enough to make a pale outline of the open doorway.

Nevertheless, there was no other way in. To remain where she was might be safer, but she had no idea of the gunman's whereabouts. If he was above her, her position was dangerous even though she was wearing a navy-blue housecoat and presumably wasn't easy to see. If he was below her, he might, if he was very lucky, get a shot through the apertures in the iron. It seemed unlikely, since the lacy wrought iron was closely knit, but still . . .

She had to get through the doorway.

Dell moved as she had seen soldiers do on the films, dragging her body along by the elbows. It was even more difficult than it looked. At the sill of the doorway she rested, and then decided it would be less risky to make an upright dash through the opening than to try to slither over the threshold. She gathered strength and breath, rose, and shot through the opening.

She slammed the door in a split second, but nevertheless another bullet hit it before it was completely closed. She had always resented the weight of the heavy iron door; she would never resent it again.

She put out the light in the kitchen, snapped off the lamp in the hall, and crawled into her bedroom, where she turned off the one bedside lamp that was lit. Then, safe in the darkness, she locked the only window she had left open, the bedroom window, drew the heavy curtains across it and, in the pitch darkness, felt her way to the phone.

As she reached for it, it rang loudly in the stillness, and her heart climbed into her throat at the unexpectedness of the sound. Then she picked up the receiver and said weakly, "Hullo?"

"This is Barlow, Mrs. Kenlon. Hell of an hour to call you, but I got caught up in some business, couldn't get away. You weren't asleep, were you? How are you feeling?" There was a pause, and then, in a sharper voice, the reporter said, "Mrs. Kenlon?"

Dell said, in a flat tone, "Someone just shot me."

"*Shot* you! Are you hit? Mrs. Kenlon, answer me!"

"No," she said. "No. That was wrong. Someone shot *at* me. Twice. I'm not hit. I'm just—I'm just—"

"All right. Lock yourself in. I'll be right there. Take me ten minutes, maybe less. I'll ring five times, short rings. Don't let anyone else in." The phone clicked.

Dell stared at the receiver. Then she depressed the cradle and called the police. After what seemed an interminable number of transfers, she finally convinced the last man that he could not help her, that no one could help her except Lieutenant Keeley.

"Well," he said, "Lieutenant Keeley is off duty, but if it's as important as all that I guess you can call him at home." He gave her a telephone number.

The phone rang only once before Keeley said, "Yes?"

By that time she was entirely coherent.

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Keeley said, " I see. I see. All right. I'll be right over." He repeated her address. " I'll press the bell three times, long, deliberate rings. Don't open the door to anyone else."

He hung up and she was alone again in the dark house. But not for long, she felt, on a note of rising hysteria. At any minute the doorbell would be ringing in various and complicated signals . . . The absurdity of it overcame her panic.

She felt her way into her bathroom where, since it had no windows, she could turn on a light. She combed her hair and put on lipstick. Before she had quite finished, the doorbell pealed five times, quickly. The reporter, she thought, if I have my code straight.

It was Barlow. She saw his face in the light from the outside hall: concern, honest, deep concern, was written all over it. He said, " You're not hurt? You're really all right? "

She closed the door and pressed the light switch on the left. Instead of a lamp or an overhead light, the switch controlled the small, tapered bulbs concealed beneath the paintings on the walls, and the hall bloomed into soft and lovely radiance.

" Yes," she said. " I really am all right. Put your hat on the table and let's sit here in the hall, so we won't be within range of any of the windows."

But he stood still, looking at the walls. " What beautiful—Oh," he said, " you must be Max Kenlon's widow."

" Yes, those are Max's."

The doorbell rang, three long rings, and she went to open the door. Barlow came out of his picture-filled trance a second too late. He said sharply, " Don't! "

Keeley, standing in the doorway, said, " Don't what? "

" I was going to say, ' Don't open the door,' but—"

" Were you? And how did you get in here? "

" Same way you did. How do you think I got in—through the window? "

" No, I thought maybe you shot through the window."

Barlow put his hat on the table with quiet deliberation, and turned around so that he was squarely facing Keeley. He said, " Did you, now? That's an interesting idea. It's also insulting, slanderous, and actionable."

" Really? Well, then, why don't you try bringing an action? But although we both know you think you're smarter than the police, it's still my duty to point out you're not supposed to know where Mrs. Kenlon lives. You have no right to be here, and you got here awfully fast."

" I'm not the only one who knows where Mrs. Kenlon lives."

" No? Who else does? Your paper's entire circulation? "

" No, Keeley, they don't," Barlow said. " *You* do."

The lieutenant took one quick step forward, and Dell put her hand on his arm. She said, " Don't you think, Lieutenant Keeley, that we ought to close the door? "

The two men looked at her as if they had forgotten her existence.

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She put the thought into words: "It seems to me that you are both missing the point. Bullets—*bullets*"—her voice shook with incredulity—"have been raining round me. And all I was doing was putting out the rubbish—" She caught her breath.

Keeley's face had lost its antagonism. He closed the door and leaned back against it. His voice was very gentle. "You're right, Mrs. Kenlon. We were missing the point. Tell me what happened."

Dell told him. It was amazing, she thought, how anything so shocking, so foreign to all your past life, could be condensed into a few brief statements of insane fact. "The shot hit the wall; there'll be a mark, I imagine . . . I lay on my stomach . . . Another bullet hit the backdoor. And then you came," she finished.

She put her hand to her head in an unconscious little gesture of confusion. "There was something else . . . Oh yes. While you two were—discussing—the rather absurd possibilities, I was thinking that there's someone else who knows where I live."

Keeley said, "Who?"

"Lieutenant Orcutt."

"Oh. Well, that's a legitimate point. I think I'd better explain the situation to you. Can we sit somewhere?" He waved his hat in a rather helpless fashion.

"I thought we ought to stay here, away from the windows."

Barlow said to Keeley, "Aren't you going to take a look round outside? Or don't you care to?"

Keeley's face was stony. "You think he's waiting out there for me? Aren't you going home? Or don't you have one?"

Dell said, "Please." Her face twisted a little.

Keeley said, "I'm sorry. Let's sit down."

The hall had been furnished, not as a place to lounge in, but as a passageway and a gallery, and so as they sat in three of the four straight chairs, they looked and felt stiff and uncomfortable. The men were at either end of the long, narrow table, and Dell sat between them.

As he settled on his chair, Keeley looked up at the walls, at each glowing frame in its individual soft light, and said, "Max Kenlon's?"

"Yes."

"Oh." He absorbed the knowledge with less surprise than Barlow had shown. "Well, about George Orcutt. I don't think he has a thing to do with Mathias's death, but I'm surprised the name doesn't mean anything to you. It looks like an offshoot of the Orcutt case, you see."

Dell looked blank.

"You don't remember it? It was quite a sensation about seven years ago. Perhaps it made a greater impression on me than on most people because I was new to the Force. And I originally came from Staten Island.

"There was this family who lived on Staten Island. Name was Orcutt. That is, the main branch was named Orcutt; there

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were dozens of cousins and in-laws. They ruled the island in a way, but everyone thought it was all above-board. They owned timber yards, and a contracting firm, and a cement business. Two of 'em held high civic office. All very honourable. And then one day a Manhattan cop, a captain of police, spilt everything. No one has ever been sure why he decided to talk, and he never explained. He was Sedgley Mathias, the man who was killed today. Most likely, he was cheated on a pay-off.

" Whatever his reasons, from what Mathias had to say, it became very clear that the Orcutt gang was running not only Staten Island, but a large part of the five boroughs. There weren't many outsiders like Sedgley Mathias in the deal; it was all family. There were Williamses, Barolas, and—well, I've forgotten all the relatives' names. They were cops; they were in City Hall; they were all over the place.

" It was a big newspaper sensation, of course, because it had a kind of feudal touch. At first it was even romantic, in a nasty sort of way. But more and more stuff came out, and pretty soon it wasn't just a matter of graft and corrupting officials—it was blackmail and arson and murder, a number of murders."

Barlow said, " It made an impression on me, too. I had just got my first reporting job. And since then I've rehashed it in articles a number of times. Two of the men were sentenced to death, and went to the chair."

Dell again had the feeling that the two men had forgotten her. They were talking *to* her, it was true, but they were bound together by an interest that she couldn't begin to share, didn't want to share.

Politics, corruption, murder, people who " went to the chair "—these things could not be real to her.

But she saw that to Barlow and Keeley it was a professionally intriguing puzzle, and the antagonism which had hummed between them a few minutes earlier had given way to an impersonal but mutual fascination.

Keeley said, " Yes, two men went to the chair: the patriarch, Daniel Orcutt, and his eldest son, Sam. Half a dozen others went to prison for varying terms. But that wasn't the end of the Orcutts. Some hereditary strain seems to be at work. We're constantly picking up men, for everything from petty larceny to murder, who turn out to have Orcutt blood."

Dell said, " Like Lieutenant Orcutt."

Keeley hesitated. " Yes, we can't get round the fact that George is an Orcutt. Daniel Orcutt had three sons: Samuel was executed; George was a young cop who had broken with his family; William was a kid who was ignored at the time, but has since created quite a rumpus."

" So you think William shot Mathias? " Barlow asked interestedly.

" We think so. He turned up in the West some time ago, behaving like a traditional bad man—holding up banks in small

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towns. He gave his real name on three or four occasions, and there is enough supporting evidence to be pretty certain he is really William Orcutt. He's never been caught, never been fingerprinted, or photographed, but descriptions all tally with the one Mrs. Kenlon gave me this morning. On the few occasions he opened his mouth he spoke rather vaguely of revenge."

Barlow said, " Mathias wasn't too lily-white a character. Maybe quite a number of people would be interested to have him dead."

" Mathias went to gaol for five years. Since he came out he has been working as a salesman in the wholesale-grocery business. His wife had divorced him while he was in prison, and she now lives, under another name, with her two children, in the same building as Mrs. Harrington, Mrs. Kenlon's mother. Mathias had been making his usual Sunday visit to the children this morning."

Keeley paused. Then he added, " The big point is this: during the last month Headquarters has received three letters. They were identical, and very much in the old-fashioned, melodramatic pattern. They said, *Mathias will die. Revenge means murder.*"

There was a little silence. Then Barlow said, " All right. Maybe your guess is good, maybe it is the young Orcutt. What are you doing about it? Why aren't you outside seeing what you can find out? "

Keeley said, " Don't be a fool! I phoned the station before I left my house, and four men met me downstairs. They're doing the routine—taking footprint casts if there are any prints, checking on the roof, and so on. Just because you've appointed yourself unofficial investigator of police affairs—"

Barlow snapped, " My articles have helped get a lot of innocent men out of gaol."

" Your articles have helped to get a lot of hardened criminals out of gaol."

" You're twisting the facts." Barlow's face was set in stubborn lines which, instead of detracting from his handsomeness, somehow made it the more noticeable. " What about the angle of the bullets? If you'd look—"

" You'd better stick to your job," Keeley said coldly, " because as usual you're not doing very well at mine. Didn't you hear Mrs. Kenlon? One shot hit a stone wall, one a steel door. *What* angles? A nick in stone or a scratch on paint doesn't give us an angle."

" Well, aren't you going to look for the man? "

" Yes, we're going to look for him! " Keeley bellowed. He stopped, took a deep breath, and said, " Meanwhile you can explain what you are doing here."

Barlow didn't seem to hear the question. He examined a painting on the opposite wall, presenting Keeley with a view of his excellent profile.

Dell said hastily, " I can explain that." She told Keeley about her meeting with Barlow and Peters.

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Instead of being appeased, Keeley looked angrier. "So now another person, a news photographer named Peters, knows where Mrs. Kenlon lives.

"What happened to the photograph Peters took?"

"I told him to destroy the negative and the one print he made. You think that was ungallant of me?"

The flat of Keeley's hand hit the hall table with a crash. "Stop clowning!"

Barlow raised his voice: "Well, stop acting as if it were all my fault! I'm as anxious as you—" He stopped abruptly, as if he had suddenly become aware that the object of his anxiety was sitting there quietly while he and Keeley shouted.

Keeley turned to Dell. He looked embarrassed. "I apologize for this—this bickering. This afternoon I was really sure you would be in the clear; it's a blow to me to learn otherwise. I'll go downstairs now and see if my men have learnt anything. I'll be back in the morning with a ballistics expert. We'll take a look in daylight. Meanwhile, I'll leave two men—one at the front, one at the back."

Dell was pale with exhaustion. "Will I have to stay indoors tomorrow?" she asked listlessly.

"No, but please don't go to work. That district is too thickly populated. If you stay out of crowds you'll be O.K., because one of my men will be right behind you, wherever you go—one step behind you at all times."

Dell said slowly, "About Lieutenant Orcutt—"

"Yes, Mrs. Kenlon?" Keeley looked tired, too. Tired but dogged.

"Well, I don't really understand. You admit that these Orcutts are bad. You mention heredity, but you absolve him."

"I don't absolve him, Mrs. Kenlon. I don't even like him very much. But I just don't think, on the basis of his record, that he is implicated. He was the good Orcutt. Just as respectable families sometimes have a black sheep, he was the white sheep in his."

"But he was—outrageous to me."

"I know." Keeley looked reflective. "I think it was shock. Fury at knowing what he was about to go through again. The understandable hope that it just wasn't happening. I think, before he got himself in hand, he had some sort of blind, blundering thought that he could discredit you and make it all untrue. Not nice of him, I admit, but a very human reaction."

Keeley stood up. He said to Barlow, "Coming?"

Barlow rose reluctantly. "Can I get you anything?" he asked Dell.

"I'll be fine, thanks." She smiled her gratitude.

Keeley walked abruptly to the door, flung it open, and marched the few feet across the outer hall to the lift.

Barlow started slowly after him, but stopped in the open doorway and said to Dell in a low voice, "Perhaps if I call you—perhaps we can go to some quiet place for dinner tomorrow evening?"

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He seemed less sure of himself, and he was even nicer that way, Dell thought. She looked past him at the lieutenant's back. Keeley was standing stolidly facing the lift. "Yes," she said to Barlow. "Perhaps we can." She raised her voice. "Good night, Lieutenant Keeley," she called.

"Good night, Mrs. Kenlon." His voice was pleasant, but he didn't turn round.

At nine the next morning Dell called her firm and explained that she wouldn't be able to get to work because she had a bad cold. They were so nice about it that she was ashamed.

Keeley appeared at ten o'clock with two other men. He was very formal with her. She repeated her story once more and demonstrated what had happened out on the fire-escape. In the light of day, with the lush new green of the gardens blanketing the ground below her, the night-time experience seemed remote, almost impossible. But the jagged nicks were there: white on grey stone; orange on black iron.

The men spent some considerable time talking about "angles of this" and "angles of that" but she had the feeling that they were getting nowhere, and knew it.

Then Keeley joined her in the sun-flooded living-room. He didn't sit down but wandered round the room, looking carefully at the paintings on the walls.

To Dell, his presence carried a kind of significance that she refused to analyse. It seemed odd for him to be in the room, she thought, and tried to leave the thought there. But it wouldn't be left. Perhaps, she decided, her vague feeling of unrest grew out of the fact that he didn't *look* odd. His open, boyish face was nothing like Max's wonderful dark homeliness—the charming kind of ugliness that a few rare, unselfconscious men are able to turn to advantage to make a part of their compelling personalities. But Keeley's bigness, the set of his shoulders as he stood—back to her, examining a magnificent crowd scene—was reminiscent of Max.

In an effort to forget that resemblance she asked a question she immediately felt was gauche, "Do you like his work?"

Keeley turned to face her, surprise clearly written on his pleasant face. "Of course. Did he have any critics?" He was obviously sincere.

She laughed. "One or two." She sobered. "But even they thought that in time . . ." Her voice trailed off.

He completed the thought: "And he didn't get the time."

"No."

He moved on to another picture and said, "These are originals, of course? I don't remember ever having seen even a print of that one of the crowd."

"They're the originals. In the bedroom I have reproductions of some that are hung in museums and in private collections."

"I see. Then these"—he waved his arm to indicate the four

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walls—" and the ones in the hall must represent a lot of money? "

She said stiffly, " Why, yes, I suppose so."

" But you've undoubtedly had offers. Any particularly persistent would-be buyers? "

She stared at him. " Why, yes. A few."

" I see. All recognized dealers or collectors? "

" I think so. Why? "

" Well—" He seemed at a loss for words, as if he weren't sure himself of the answer. " I'm looking—fumbling, I guess—for a connection."

" Connection? Connection with what? "

" Mathias's apartment—his own, not his wife's—is a very plush affair. He has a few Kenlon drawings, and one small oil. I've been checking up."

Dell felt confusion coming over her. Since the lieutenant entered the apartment she had felt safe; he was *supposed* to make her safe, she thought. She felt an unreasonable resentment at his presenting this new theory, which upset everything. She said abruptly, " Wait. Wait." She sat down on the couch and spoke more quietly: " But Orcutt—William Orcutt. I thought—"

" Yes." Keeley sat down facing her, leaned forward, and started slowly twirling his hat between his knees. " Yes. I gave you that idea, I know. But there's always the chance that I may be wrong. The whole business is beginning to look—confused."

" But *you* can't be confused! " Dell protested.

He looked up quickly, and his eyes caught and held hers. " You mean I'm the doctor, and I've got to be able to—to supply a correct diagnosis? "

She didn't say anything.

" It's flattering of you, Mrs. Kenlon. But the doctors can't always get it right the first time. It doesn't mean I won't take care of you. It's just that the sooner I get it straight, the safer you'll be."

" It's not only being safe." She didn't know how to explain. She tried: " I'm the ' eyewitness,' I'm the ' innocent bystander,' the mysterious woman being protected by the police. These are fantastic things—things you read about others, but never *are*, yourself. I've tried to accept that, but now you're suggesting something else—that there's a connection of some kind between me and these people who—who hold up banks, and are crooked policemen and—"

She paused, and then said agitatedly, " But it's a ridiculous suggestion! I was just going to my mother's. I was just—"

" I know." As on the previous day, he interrupted her to save her from panic. But then he dropped his eyes again and stared down at the hat, as he moved it slowly round between his hands. He said, " But I'd be a bad doctor if I didn't recognize and take into consideration all the symptoms. I thought it was Orcutt. It's still possible. But the coincidence of Mathias's pictures made me wonder . . ." He stopped. " Well," he said, " we'll see."

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He asked a few more questions about the shooting on the fire-escape, and then left rather abruptly. She felt thoroughly confused, and almost overwhelmed by a sense of foreboding.

By five o'clock, when Barlow called, she was feeling like a caged mouse. She had begun to realize that her listlessness was at least partially the result of lack of air and exercise. Policemen might be stationed in front and at the back of the house, but Dell found herself unable to open her windows, and was obliged to leave the curtains drawn.

Barlow's pleasant voice came over the telephone like a reprieve. She assured him she would be delighted to have dinner with him, and agreed that six-thirty would be fine. Later, when she opened the door to him, it was good to see his handsome face like that of an old friend.

She had never been in the restaurant before. It was called The Jade Room, and jade the decor was, an even tone of deep, restful, soft green—rugs, ceiling, walls. The white tablecloths shone invitingly against the soothing background. The headwaiter found them a table in a far corner of the room.

Dell settled into her chair, sipping her cocktail, and listened to Barlow. He was gay and amusing, and with his every word she felt herself relaxing more and more. When the waiter came up and stood with pencil poised, Barlow suggested steak, and Dell agreed. As the waiter went off, Barlow put his arms on the table and leaned towards her, smiling.

"Were you in the dumps?" he asked.

Dell found herself thinking that there was something about him—was it his handsomeness?—that made her feel he was just a little too good to be true. She said, "Yes, I was."

"Did the stalwart lieutenant—?" The headwaiter was hovering, and Barlow looked up.

"Excuse me, sir, but I believe you are wanted on the phone."

Barlow started to rise, then immediately dropped back into his seat. "That's impossible," he said.

"Aren't you Mr. James Barlow?"

"Yes, but no one knows I'm here. I didn't make a reservation. How did you—?"

The headwaiter was polite but hurried. He clearly had other duties. "The gentleman on the phone described you and the lady very definitely, and he gave me your name. The phone is in the foyer on the right." He sketched a bow and moved away.

Barlow looked at Dell and shrugged. "I don't understand it at all, but excuse me, will you? I'll be right back."

Dell watched him cross the big room. She felt a vague uneasiness.

He returned to the table in a very short time. He looked upset. "Dell, I'm sorry about this." She noted the use of her first name; it was the first time he had called her by it. "That was Peters—Pete Peters, you know?" She nodded. "Well, he's practically incoherent. I couldn't understand most of what he said, but I

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did get the fact that he's in a café farther down the street and wants me to come there for a minute. He refused to come here—said he couldn't." He paused and frowned. "I'm rather worried. Do you mind if I go and have a word with him?"

"Go ahead. I'll be fine. Really."

"All right." He hesitated; then he added, "I won't be long." He flipped his hand in the little gesture he used so well and for so many meanings. This time it could be translated as "I'll be seeing you." Then he walked quickly towards the door.

On the way he stopped briefly to speak to a waiter, and then mounted the two steps to the foyer. As the front door closed she noticed that he hadn't bothered to get his coat from the cloakroom.

A few minutes later the waiter brought Dell half a dozen oysters. The gentleman had instructed him, he said, to serve madame's dinner.

Dell finished her oysters; then had some soup and a few bites of steak before her increasing uneasiness reached its climax. It was certainly half an hour since Barlow had left her; she ought to do something, but what?

Should she leave? But that would appear mannerless. Besides, in spite of the existence of the police guard—a shadowy unidentifiable figure Jim Barlow had indicated to her when they left the house—she would feel unsafe in the street. She would feel alone, police or no police. And, as a further ridiculous difficulty, she doubted whether she had enough money with her to pay the bill.

Call the lieutenant—she corrected herself—call the police? But what could she say? That she had been deserted by her escort?

She was sitting very straight, hands clasped tightly in her lap, when the tall young man came through the door. He stopped at the head of the steps and looked around the room. Then he saw Dell, removed his hat, and came across the room to her table.

He bowed slightly. "Mrs. Kenlon." It wasn't a question, but she nodded rigidly. "I've come to take you home." He paused. "Unless you'd like to finish your dinner," he added politely.

"No. No. I don't want— Who are you?"

He looked surprised. "I thought you saw me across the street from your apartment. I'm the detective assigned to you. Police."

"Oh." The shadowy figure Barlow had pointed out. Dell collected her handbag and gloves, and rose; when she reached for her coat she found he was holding it for her. But instead of lifting her arms, she stood motionless. She said over her shoulder, "I don't think I can pay the bill."

He said, "Your coat." And then, reassuringly, "Don't worry about the bill."

The people at the next table were staring. She had come with one man, eaten alone, and now another man was urging her to leave. She quickly got her arms into the sleeves of her coat, and then moved rapidly towards the exit.

She mounted the thick-carpeted steps to the foyer and stood waiting while the man said a few words to the headwaiter.

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Then he climbed the steps and came towards her. Until that moment Dell had been standing passively waiting, but just before he reached her she turned decisively, walked across to a small, straight chair upholstered in jade velvet, and sat down. As he came up to her she said, "No."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said no. I'm not going anywhere with you."

He looked bewildered. "But I just want to take you home, Mrs. Kenlon."

She put her hand to her forehead. She felt as confused as she had the previous morning. "Where's Mr. Barlow?" she asked. "Why didn't he come back?"

"Mr. Barlow is—unable to come. I'll show you my credentials."

"I won't go with you."

He stood in front of her, looking rather foolish. The cloakroom girl was watching him with a carefully expressionless face. Dell ignored him. What time would the place close, she wondered, as she looked past him towards the dining-room. Well, she'd just sit for a while. Something would happen to clear her mind. Something . . .

The man in grey said, "I guess I understand, Mrs. Kenlon." He walked stiffly across the small foyer into the telephone booth. When he came out he sat down opposite her on the chair beside the booth. It seemed too small for him.

They sat quietly, ten feet apart. There was almost no coming and going. The dinner hour was well on its way, but people were not leaving yet. The green carpeting had a deep, lush pile and the ceiling was efficiently soundproofed. Dell and the man seemed almost alone in a silent green world.

Dell had no idea how long they had held their stiff positions, but when the door opened and Lieutenant Keeley came in, it seemed suddenly as if hours had passed. He took two steps inside the door, and then Dell was there in front of him; she had run across the little distance. He took one look at her white face and moved the extra step towards her.

His suit was a scratchy tweed but it seemed to Dell, leaning against him, to feel comfortable, exactly as it should feel. His right arm encircling her shoulders was very tight, very secure. She stood still.

Over her shoulder the voice of the young detective said, "I'm sorry, Lieutenant. She wouldn't budge."

"Well, of course she wouldn't. She's frightened." Keeley sounded angry. But not at her, Dell thought. Not at the young man, either.

"Oh. Well, I thought you'd think I should have—"

Keeley interrupted, but more gently, "Never mind. You did right to call me."

There was a little silence, and then the young man said, "Shouldn't we—?" He cleared his throat. "People are . . ." His voice trailed off.

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Keeley said calmly, " To hell with people."

People, Dell thought. Cloakroom girl. Headwaiter. People in the dining-room. She drew a little away from him. Instantly, without seeming to move, Lieutenant Keeley retreated. His face was entirely impersonal. He said, " Shall we go home now? "

Dell said, " Yes. I'm sorry to have— I'm sure you're busy. I'll go with this young man now."

" I'll take you," Keeley said.

They rode home in a car that had been parked in front of the restaurant. Keeley sat at the back with Dell; the young man sat in front with a third man who had been waiting at the wheel. After the lieutenant had given her address to the driver, Dell asked the question, " Jim Barlow? "

Keeley hesitated. " He's been—hurt," he said finally. " I don't know how badly, and I don't know the details. Let's leave it until the morning. We'll see then. How was it he wasn't with you? "

She told him about the call from Peters. Then she repeated her earlier apology, " I'm sorry to have taken you away from your home. You *were* home? I didn't—"

He interrupted, " Doesn't matter. My home is an empty, pretty depressing apartment."

She had not given any real thought to his home. " I wasn't asking—"

" I know that. But there's no reason I should have the advantage." He smiled at her. " I was married, too. My wife died seven months after our marriage. Polio."

What should one say? What did people say to her, to the widow of Max Kenlon? She couldn't remember. " I'm sorry," she murmured.

" Well, it was all so long ago. Ten years. Nothing really left." He paused. Then he said in a different tone, " That's it, isn't it? There's nothing left. Just emptiness. Like the apartment."

When they reached the house, he said, " Carpenter." The young man beside the driver turned round. " Mrs. Kenlon, this is Sergeant Carpenter. He's going to be one of the watchers at your house tomorrow. There'll be other men tonight. You can trust the sergeant if you need help."

Carpenter ducked his head in a small bow.

Keeley insisted upon going up in the lift with her, and waiting until she had unlocked the door. Then he stood on the threshold, hat in hand, and delivered a little speech.

" Please don't feel embarrassed. I realize that you might feel that way, but your fright is entirely understandable. I'd even go a step farther: since you didn't know who Carpenter was, it would have been foolish of you to walk out into the night with him. You behaved exactly as you should have done. But perhaps it would be wise to call a doctor. You see, you are suffering from shock. It's quite understandable."

He examined the last word, seemed to remember that he had

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said it before, and suddenly got red. Over the word, Dell wondered, over his kindness?

He said, "Good night," abruptly, and stepped into the lift. As the door sighed to its automatic close, Dell had a final glimpse of his face. It was tired, concerned, and very, very familiar.

Dell watched the lift until it was out of sight.

Daylight had its usual effect. The sun was bright, the day was warm, spring was in the air.

Dell felt more embarrassed in the light of day than she had the night before. Then she had been numb; now she felt that she had behaved dramatically and foolishly. The lieutenant's words were remembered balm. Of course, she had been frightened but her mind argued back, not for very good reasons.

There was no reason to relate all the events of the universe to herself; she must stop doing so immediately. And she certainly mustn't panic for the rest of her life at the sight of every man who wore a grey overcoat.

At ten o'clock an unfamiliar voice came over her phone. He was Officer Johnson, he informed her, and he was calling at Lieutenant Keeley's request. The lieutenant was at the hospital with Mr. Barlow, but he would call Mrs. Kenlon as soon as possible, probably early in the afternoon.

"What hospital? May I go to see Mr. Barlow?"

"I don't know what hospital, ma'am," Officer Johnson said woodenly. "I don't think he can have visitors."

Dell decided Johnson was probably under orders. Still, she tried again. "What happened to Mr. Barlow? How was he hurt?"

"I don't know that, ma'am. The lieutenant will telephone as soon as he can."

There was nothing she could do about it. She said, "Thanks," and hung up.

But her morning's first confidence had evaporated. The day might be light and bright, but uneasiness sat heavily and darkly within the apartment. She cleaned the rooms; she called her mother, her office, and her neglected friends, fibbing to all of them.

By three o'clock she had taken to pacing up and down. When she caught herself at it, she stopped and went to the phone. When she was told that Lieutenant Keeley wasn't available, she asked for Officer Johnson.

He came quickly to the telephone and said, "Oh yes, ma'am, I was trying to get you on another line. The lieutenant is on his way here, to the police station. He telephoned a minute ago and gave me a message for you—"

She interrupted, "I'm coming down there."

There was a pause. Then he said dubiously, "Well, I suppose that'll be all right, but he said to tell you to stick close to Carpenter."

After she had put her hat and coat on, Dell hesitated for a minute. In spite of her determination to rise above fear, she found

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herself unable to leave the apartment thrown wide to sun and air. Feeling cowardly, she nevertheless went from window to window, closing each one and pulling the draw-cords that controlled the long, heavy curtains.

Through a back window she saw one of her watchdogs, sitting on an uncomfortable bench and looking out of place in overcoat and hat among the young green of the garden shrubbery. The minute he glimpsed a movement at her window, he looked up attentively. It made her feel safer. She smiled down at him and thought he smiled back. It was too far to see distinctly.

Carpenter was a few steps down the street, no longer a shadowy figure to Dell, but a personality. As he came over to her, she said, " I'm going down to Headquarters."

" All right. I'll call a cab. You won't mind if I ride with you? "

" Not at all. The lieutenant said—"

" I know. I just phoned him from a booth across the street. I can see your front door from there. I got the same message." He smiled. He had a friendly face, Dell decided, and felt a return of embarrassment.

But Carpenter gave her no chance for embarrassment during the ride. To her question whether he had had a boring day, he said, " No, I've had a parade of astonished men on my hands. You see, our description of the—the suspect is so general. ' Nice-looking ' is about the most definite word we've got to go on. Who am I to say who's nice-looking? So every man under sixty and over five feet three who entered your building has had to identify himself . . ."

The cab drew up at Headquarters, and Carpenter guided her straight in through a corridor lined with cubbyholes to a door. Keeley was inside. He said, " Thanks, Carpenter," in dismissal, and, " Hullo, Mrs. Kenlon." The door shut, and they were alone in the small office.

The lieutenant looked tired. Dell wondered if police lieutenants always looked tired and worried. Did they all work so hard? Did they all take their cases so much to heart?

At the sight of her his face changed subtly. It was still tired-looking, but took on a calmer expression. He said, " You look fine. Sit down, and let me give you a cigarette."

" Thank you. And tell me, please, about Jim Barlow. How is he? May I see him? What happened to him? "

Keeley's brief moment of peace seemed to have been destroyed. " Yes," he said. " Barlow." He got out of his chair and went over to a wall, where he examined a framed document of some kind. Then he turned round and said flatly, " Barlow's dead."

Dell sat still in the uncomfortable oak chair and stared at him. His face looked tortured.

" Mrs. Kenlon, I don't want to hurt you. I don't know how much that information hurts you—"

She said woodenly, " It hurts me to know a young man like Jim

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Barlow has died. It hurts me to think that I was responsible, no matter how little I could help it. And, selfishly, it hurts and frightens me to know that death is all around me, and I can do nothing to prevent it. But I'm not—I wasn't—I'm just sorry."

He said, "I see." And she knew he did see. He examined the framed paper again, and when he turned round his face had reverted to normal—little actual expression, but with an underlying kindness.

"What did he die of?" Dell asked.

He came back and sat in his chair. "There's both a simple answer to that question and a very complex one. He was throttled—seized around the neck from the rear and choked." Dell nodded. "And he was shot. He died of the shot, which grazed his heart. That's the simple explanation. But there's much more to it than that. He died because he was in some way implicated in—" he gestured, looking for a word—"the whole business."

"You mean with the Orcutts?"

"No. I mean in the shooting of Mathias and the things that led up to it and to the attack on you."

"But isn't it the same thing?"

Keeley sat back in his chair and spoke slowly, "No. I don't think it is. I'm beginning to understand it, but there's so much . . . I think Barlow was shot because he wanted to protect you."

"But you just said—"

"I don't think he wanted to protect you until he met you. I think, until then, it was decided, either by Barlow or with his consent, that you must be put out of the way. Then he fell in love with you, or came as near it as one can in such a short time. Dying, he had only one thought—to protect you. He didn't say more than half a dozen words, and half of those were 'Dell.'

"You see, although he died of a bullet that entered his back on the right and came out of the left breast, the throttling made it almost impossible for him to speak. The first time he was conscious he managed to say, 'Dell.' The second time, when he said it again, I realized it was a question, and I assured him you were all right. When he understood that, he said, 'Paroles. Racket.' The last time he was conscious it took him several minutes to manage his words. First he said, 'Protect Dell.' It seemed to cost him agony to get out the next word, but he finally managed 'Cops.' Or," Keeley said slowly, "it might have been 'Cop.'"

It made no sense to her. She said, "But there's nothing in those few words to implicate him."

"Not necessarily, no. But those few words tie in with some ideas I've been developing in the past twenty-four hours. That's what I was fumbling towards when I discussed your pictures with you."

He leaned forward earnestly. "By yesterday, Mrs. Kenlon, the whole Orcutt set-up had begun to seem—foolish to me. Too clear-cut. Too melodramatic. And there were some very peculiar little points. For instance, why should William Orcutt want to kill you, when all he had to do was go to Kalamazoo, the Fiji

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Islands, Hoboken—any place? It's true that I suggested he might want to—to remove you, as a possible witness. But when the attempt was made I was astonished, because by that time I had realized that Orcutt would have beat it, and fast.

"And getting out of reach wouldn't have been difficult for him. For one small instance, we had no photographs to circulate to stations, ports, and airports. So why hang around, go looking for you, flirt with danger?

"Well, if he were unbalanced he might do just that. But no Orcutt has ever been found certifiably insane. Criminal, but not crazy. The only conceivable reason we had for thinking he might be crazy was his stress on revenge. And that, while not strong enough to suggest insanity, did suggest something else to me. Those letters saying, Mathias will die, revenge means murder, were so—fortuitous. The minute Mathias was killed, our suspect was ready-made."

Keeley went on slowly, "Now, there's nothing wrong with an open-and-shut case. Despite the detective stories, murder is usually open and shut. Someone is killed; there is a logical suspect; we pick him up and he confesses, or we can prove his guilt beyond a jury's doubt. But when, on rare occasions, a murder is bizarre and requires real solving, then it's a mass of facts, suspicions, and contradictions. And yet here we have a real fancy one—a tribal feud, a vendetta, and murder for revenge—and it's all neat and prepared for us. Very strange.

"So then I fell back on a little trick of mine that I use every time I get a case that doesn't seem right."

He paused for a minute, and added, "Keep it a secret, if you don't mind, because it sounds as if I'm simple-minded. But it often works. I just ask myself what circumstance strikes me as being *unrelatedly* odd. When people deliberately set about outwitting the authorities they take great care of the related points; it's the things they don't think matter that you have to watch for. And a remote oddity came to me: Barlow's presence."

Dell said, "But Barlow wasn't there."

"No. But he was here."

Dell stared at him. "I don't understand."

"Well, you see, Barlow was rarely here at Headquarters, because he was primarily a rewrite man. Sunday-paper stuff. *Was Justice Done?*—that kind of thing. He sometimes went out on news assignments, but I don't think I had ever seen him lounging around the press room before. Never. So it was a point—that irrelevant, odd point—and I went to work on it."

"I just don't see how."

"Well, George Orcutt and I went through the file of Barlow's articles. It's a file we police keep handy because—" Keeley's full lips drew into a straight line—"because it's such a thorn in our side. Or knife in our back. About three years ago Barlow dropped the question out of his titles. Instead of asking *if*, he started saying that justice *wasn't* done. He—"

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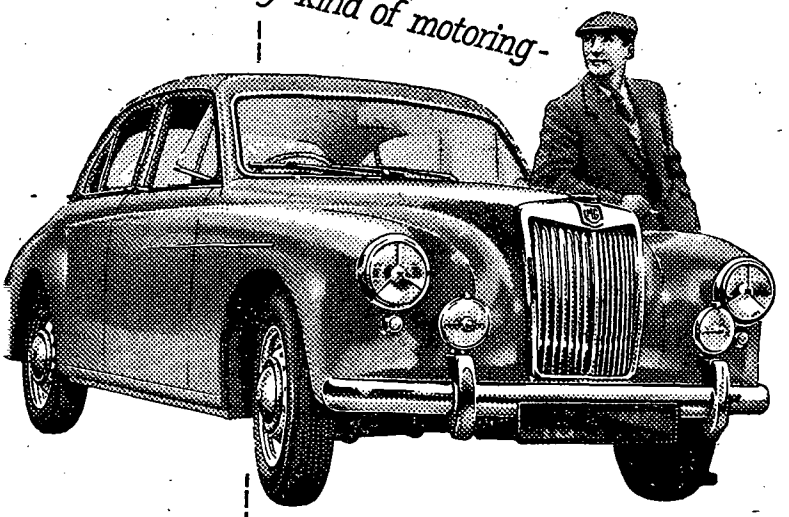

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The door opened and a man stuck his head in. He saw Dell, said, " Sorry," and withdrew. But before the door had shut, Keeley called out, " Come in, George."

Orcutt came in with obvious reluctance. He gave Dell a curt nod.

Keeley said, " I was about to outline our conclusions in regard to the Barlow clippings for Mrs. Kenlon. You tell her."

Orcutt wasted no time. He stood, massively, just inside the door and put up his stubby right hand. He ticked off the points on his fingers.

" One, three years ago he stopped dealing with crimes of passion —amateur crimes—and took up the cudgels for professionals, usually habitual criminals. Two, every single professional he wrote about was in the same prison. Just that one prison. Three, in each case he displayed knowledge that we, the police, thought only we had. Four, he very often presented new evidence, facts we hadn't known about that, when we checked on them, turned out to be true—or else had been invented since the crime was committed. Five, all these prisoners were released on parole shortly after the publication of his articles. That's all. Excuse me, Keeley—Mrs. Kenlon."

He backed out. He was not, Dell thought, very happy in her presence.

Keeley said to Dell, " Well, that's almost it. There are a few other things: the articles were well done and very persuasive, but although we couldn't prove it, their premise—that an innocent man had been framed and sentenced—was always false. And Sedgley Mathias had been in that particular prison." He lapsed into a contemplative silence.

Dell said, " I'm sorry, Lieutenant, but I don't understand. I suppose all these things, put together . . . but I don't know how to put them together."

" Of course you don't. Even I—and I'm trained to the job—couldn't do it immediately. But I did begin to get an inkling. And then Barlow's death and the way he died helped put the pieces together for me.

" First of all, Pete Peters had not telephoned Barlow in the restaurant. Peters was at his home in Brooklyn in the middle of a family party. Besides, the term ' open book ' might have been coined to describe Peters's life. So Jim Barlow lied to you. But Barlow did go to meet *someone* in the garage down the street. Now, if that person wanted to kill him, why not just shoot him? Why grab him and hold on until Barlow was almost strangled to death? I think the attacker was trying to get Barlow to agree to something, to force him into it. When Barlow wouldn't give in, he shot him.

" Furthermore, Mrs. Kenlon "—Keeley looked very earnest—" I think the point at issue was you—your life or death. An attempt had been made on your life. Barlow had on him the picture of you he told us he had destroyed, the picture Peters took. Barlow had you out to dinner. You—your presence, your picture,

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your existence—seem to have been the prime consideration. I think Barlow died to protect you."

Jim Barlow, Dell thought. Should I feel grateful to him for protecting me; for dying for me? Or should I try to believe that he somehow put me in a position where I needed that drastic kind of protection?

Either conclusion was in the realm of fantasy. She could only feel uncomplicatedly sorry for Barlow. To her he had been just a cheerful, good-looking young man, simply that. But—

"Why me?" she asked desperately. "What can I possibly have to do with all this?"

"That's the question, of course." Keeley looked thoughtful. "It seems to me the motive must be different—different from the reasons for which William Orcutt might have wanted to harm you."

He smiled and the wrinkles showed around his eyes. "That's rather confused, isn't it? Well, look, Orcutt could have got out of town. I think this man couldn't.

"Barlow said, 'Cop.' Since he was trying to protect you, I don't know why he didn't give me a name; maybe there was a reason. But if it's a cop, perhaps it's someone you might easily recognize. And you are the eyewitness.

"I think Barlow originally held on to that picture of you because the idea was to hire a gunman. Use the picture as identification. Then Barlow refused to go ahead with the plan. He probably didn't destroy the picture because of—sentiment. When he wouldn't go through with the hired-killer idea, I think the other man decided to take matters in his own hands—that he had to. And he had to get Barlow out of the way first."

"But why? why?" Dell realized she was drumming on the desk with her fist. She stopped, looked confused, and added, with an effort at composure, "If it isn't the Orcutts, who is it? What's behind it?"

"Barlow told us that: a parole racket. Barlow and his gang were engineering paroles. Mathias must have learnt about it in prison and tried blackmail when he got out. That's the only way it seems to fit. Then it follows that the revenge letters were deliberate. Barlow was probably the brains of the racket, and his articles—very clever, persuasive articles—were an exploitation of publicity. They manufactured evidence; Barlow 'uncovered' it; then the parole board had to release a prisoner. The point is that whoever shot Mathias can't simply get out of sight as Orcutt would have done. He has to stay here—so an eyewitness is an active threat to him."

Dell whispered, "I'm still being hunted, then?"

"Mrs. Kenlon, I'm so sorry." He got up from his chair and went round the desk. He stopped a foot from Dell's chair. "Yes." His voice was very close, but her head was lowered and she couldn't see his face. His square hand was on the edge of the desk. The knuckles were white.

"Yes," he repeated, "you're in danger. But it's limited now,

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don't you see?" There was a pleading note in his voice. "Now that we know what to look for we'll clear it up very fast. We'll check Mathias's associates, and Barlow's. We'll crack down on some of the men who got out on parole. It will be fast, I promise, Mrs. Kenlon. But meanwhile, I don't want your nerves to give way. Stay at home. Stick to the policeman assigned to you if you must go out. I'll do anything—everything to keep you safe."

Dell raised her head, stared at the white knuckles of Keeley's hand for a minute, and then rose, and looked up at him. Her features were in careful control.

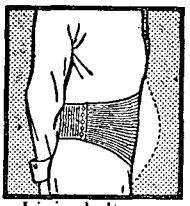
"All right, Lieutenant," she said. "I'll keep a hold on myself." She gave him a brief smile. "But it's more than nerves, you know. This—this business has robbed me of myself, of my personality. I've become, even to myself, just a symbol of fear—the eyewitness. I want to go to work, to see friends, to *be* someone again."

He made a little gesture of helplessness, almost of pain, and she repeated, "All right. I'll go home now."

"Just a minute." He went to the window. "Yes. Carpenter is waiting in front." He turned round. "Take care, Mrs. Kenlon." It was more than an instruction; it was an urgent plea.

She said, "I will. Good-bye." Then she hesitated. She had a desire to comfort him. "I suppose—I suppose things *are* more hopeful, aren't they?"

She was aware that he stood in the doorway watching her until



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she came to a turn in the corridor and walked out of his sight . . .

Outside, the sun was dying. It might seem springlike, but it was, after all, early in the year. She looked round for Carpenter, and found him across the street, standing on the edge of the kerb. In his right hand was something shining that caught the angled rays of the afternoon sun.

A cigarette lighter, she thought vaguely, because he held a cigarette between the fingers of the hand that held the gleaming metal, and a wisp of smoke curled away from him. The sun was slanting from his left, cutting across his hat brim, shading the upper part of his pleasant face. But she could see the lower part.

She stood motionless, frozen to the pavement. Then his head moved slightly and, although she still could not see his eyes, she knew he was looking at her. For the second time, as in The Jade Room, they stared at each other across an empty distance. No, Dell corrected herself—for the *third* time.

The vacuum between them was abruptly broken by a cruising taxi. Dell, panic-stricken, flung up her hand and, when the driver obeyed the signal, stumbled into the back. "Go ahead!" she shouted desperately, losing all sense of direction, "Straight ahead!"

At the corner she looked round. No car was behind them, and she couldn't see Carpenter.

She managed to give the taxi-driver her home address, repeating, "Quickly, please." Then she sat back and fought faintness. This was wrong, she realized. She should have gone back to the police station, but it was too late now. And home was Max, and steel doors, and familiarity. Home was safety and silence and snugness . . . But Max was dead. It was time to think of the present. But she *couldn't* think.

The taxi had been going in the wrong direction, and now it lost time in threading through one-way streets, but the driver, once he got in the clear, made fairly good time. Dell scrambled out at her door, hurried through the little lobby, and in a panic of fear and impatience mentally urged on the lift as it creaked upward.

When she reached the fourth floor she could hear her telephone ringing. Her stiff, unco-operative fingers seemed to take an interminable time with the key. When she got the door open, she rushed through the entrance hall without turning on the light.

The apartment was pitch dark. She remembered, then, that she had drawn all the curtains. But she didn't waste time going back to turn on the light, she knew every board in the floor. She reached the bedroom quickly and sat down on the bed. As she lifted the receiver, she turned on the bedside lamp.

It was not Keeley. That hope, she realized, was what had made her so anxious to reach the phone.

She didn't hear the man's first words, but the voice associated itself in her mind with unpleasantness.

"Mrs. Kenlon! Mrs. Kenlon! Did you understand me?" It was the unmelodious voice of Lieutenant Orcutt.

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"No," she mumbled. "No."

"I'm trying to tell you that Lieutenant Keeley is on his way over. He asked me to tell you." Orcutt had seen her in her most terror-ridden moments; he probably thought her unresponsiveness normal stupidity. She struggled for words, but he was going on, "Keeley said to tell you that he'll be there in a few minutes. If anything happens, just play for time. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she said. "Thank you." Then understanding came over her, and she said, "Yes! Hullo?"

But he had gone.

She hung up slowly. She pulled off her hat and put it beside her on top of the handbag and gloves she had flung on the bed as she dashed into the room. The lieutenant was coming. She would be all right. She stood up and turned—and there was Carpenter.

Dell screamed. The scream came of its own accord, and it echoed back at her as if someone else had made the high, sharp sound. She said quickly into the echo, "I didn't mean to do that. I didn't mean to scream. You startled me."

He said, "Did I? Who was that on the phone?"

She struggled for composure. She carefully patted her hair into place as she answered, "That was my mother. She wants me to come to dinner. I said I would." Wasn't that all she had said on the phone? Just "Yes. Thank you." She hoped so.

Time. Orcutt said she was to play for time.

Carpenter leaned against the door-frame. He looked just like—

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Carpenter. A pleasant-looking young man in a grey suit. His hat was on the back of his head, and she could see his whole face. It was all of a part now; she could add to the description that his eyes were green.

"I was going to make some coffee," she said brightly. Too brightly, she told herself. Try to be natural; try to be the same Dell as before. But she couldn't check the false brightness; she rushed on: "Would you like some coffee?"

He stood still in the doorway, staring at her as he had done before, that Sunday morning. The problem, then, had been whether or not to kill the eyewitness. And the problem had not changed.

"Mrs. Kenlon," he asked, "aren't you interested—aren't you curious about how I got in here? Or why?"

He was perfectly sane, Dell thought. He should have looked mad, but he merely looked uncertain. She would have to feed that uncertainty, make it grow in the right direction. She said, "Why, I presume it was because Lieutenant Keeley gave you a key. You're supposed to act as bodyguard—and keep an eye on me, aren't you?"

He stared at her for a minute. Then he said slowly, "It's no good. I'm sorry, but it's just no good. I knew you'd tumble to it in the long run; I told Jim Barlow you would eventually."

She had to ask, "Then why didn't you stay a shadow? Why did you risk coming to the restaurant, and after?"

He told her, "It was my job to get you home when Barlow didn't come back. Besides, Keeley had told me how vague your impressions were."

They both heard the lift come to a stop. Its doors creaked open, and then the heavy, rushing steps were as loud as if they were in the room with them.

Carpenter said in a low, dispassionate voice, "That wasn't your mother on the phone." There was a gun in his hand.

The doorbell rang.

Dell whispered, "What good will it do you now? Lieutenant Keeley will hear the shot. So what good will it do you?"

"By the time he gets in, after the shot, I'll be out of the back-door. I sent Dempsey around to the front. I told him—I haven't time to explain, but I've got it worked out. Barlow wasn't the only one who could plan things. I can, too."

He still looked sane. He also looked forthright, determined. He had solved his problem, now he was going into action. The gun moved upward.

Without hesitation, Dell's right hand swept outward. The bedside lamp crashed to the floor, and they were in pitch darkness. With the crash, Dell leapt.

It would seem that she had no time for thought, but all life can be planned during the taking of a single breath. And Dell planned to save her life. Logically, Carpenter would expect her to move, and logically she could move in only one direction, towards her

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right. The wall was behind her, the bed on her left, and Carpenter in front of her.

So Dell did the unexpected: she moved to her left. As she scrambled across the big bed, the gun exploded with a roar. And at almost the same time, there was another shot—Keeley was shooting his way in through the outer door of the apartment that Carpenter had locked against him from inside.

Dell stood motionless on the far side of the room, in the corner beside the heavy curtains that covered the window.

This was her house, she thought. She knew its every inch. She could follow Carpenter's blundering movements as clearly as if the overhead lights were blazing. He'd never find that switch he was fumbling for; it was on the wrong side of the door, behind the door. She'd always meant to have it moved.

Keeley's voice was no louder than conversational pitch; it didn't need to be, since he was in the inner hall, only a few feet from them. The darkness, Dell realized, was defeating him too. He said, " Don't be a fool, Carpenter. I know who you are, so what have you got to gain? "

Dell opened her mouth, and then shut it tight. I've never been very clever, she thought, but I haven't been just a useless dummy in all this. If I say a word now, I shall give my position away. For once the lieutenant is not going to think I'm— She left the thought there.

Carpenter was coming towards her. He made no sound, or if he did it was covered by the noise made by the lieutenant, who had just run into the bedroom doorjamb. But Carpenter was there, right in front of her, fumbling with the curtains.

She reached out her right hand and very carefully felt for the mate of the lamp that she had swept off the far bedside table. When she had a firm grasp of it, she bent slowly and reached out into the darkness with her left hand. She touched a bit of rough cloth, and then she heard a smothered gasp.

" Who's the hunter *now* ? " she thought fiercely, as she swept her left arm around Carpenter's knees and threw her weight forward.

He fell to the floor with a deafening crash, and as he landed, Dell stretched far forward, towards his head, and swung the small but heavy lamp base down. She didn't reach his head, but she caught him full on the back of his neck.

Then she stood up.

Keeley said wildly, " *Dell! Carpenter!* Where—? "

" The light switch is behind the door, Lieutenant." Her voice, she thought with pride, was very cool, very self-possessed.

He flicked the switch and then stood still, his arms at his sides, the big gun dangling uselessly. Carpenter lay at full length on his stomach, his head pillowed in the crook of his right arm.

Fragments of glass from the shattered lamp bulb were strewn across his shoulders and in his hair.

Dell was standing on the far side of him, outlined by the heavy

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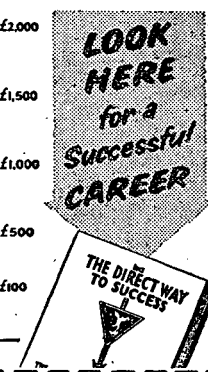

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blue curtains. Her hair was in perfect order. Even in this desperate moment, she looked charming.

Three men rushed through the outer doorway and scrambled into the bedroom. Two came over and knelt beside Carpenter. The room, filled with garish light, came alive with their energy and motion. Only she and Lieutenant Keeley were motionless. She leaned quietly against her blue backdrop, and he stood a few feet away, looking ill.

He finally said, " I thought . . . I heard the shot. You didn't say anything."

" I would have given my position away," she chided gently.

" Yes," he said, " of course."

" I was tired of being a useless dummy," she explained. " Tired of being a—a symbol of fear. I wanted you to know—" She took a step towards him and her knees buckled.

Keeley moved quickly and caught her. " I understand," he said. " But I always understood. I realized you were in a state of shock. I told you you were in a state of shock! Excuse me if I— You see, *I* am still frightened. I thought you were . . . Come."

He guided her towards the door. Over his shoulder he said, " You'll take over, Stein? "

A man said, " Sure, Lieutenant," and went to the phone.

It was comparatively quiet in the living-room. Keeley led her to the couch, and then sat on the marble-topped coffee table, facing her.

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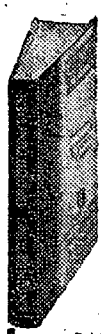

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Dell held herself erect. "I'm all right now," she said. "How did you realize you had to come at once?"

"I was watching you through the window. I had just told you to stick to Carpenter, and instead you stared at him and then jumped into a taxi alone. You had been so good; *not* a useless dummy." He smiled. "Your taxi was going the wrong way, and Carpenter got one going in the right direction."

That was why the street had been empty, Dell thought.

"So I was afraid he would get here first. I yelled to Orcutt to phone you and to send Stein, and then I tore out. And while I ran, I realized that it had all been laid on for me last night."

"Laid on?"

"Well, who else knew where you and Barlow were having dinner? Someone else could have followed, but there's no doubt that Carpenter was there. And in his report on the evening he stated that he hadn't heard a shot. The restaurant's entrance wasn't fifty yards from the garage, but Carpenter said he hadn't heard a thing. It was a stroke of luck for him that he was assigned to guard you, but he'd have found another way. He had tried once already from your garden. Carpenter was the cop Barlow died struggling to identify. And you see . . ." Keeley paused and looked past her at the wall.

"What?"

"Well, I wonder if he wasn't saying 'Carp—'"

Poor Barlow. But . . . "It's all over, isn't it?" Dell asked. "I can go back to work. I can explain to my mother. I can stop being afraid—by myself?" She gestured towards the bedroom. "They'll take him away soon?"

"Yes," he said gently.

"Oh. Well, I guess I'll have to move out of the apartment anyway. I think it has been—spoilt for me."

"That's too bad." The lieutenant sounded concerned. "It's a beautiful apartment. Perhaps we—perhaps you can redecorate it a little." His face had resumed its gentle glow.

Dell contemplated his deepening colour. Then she said, reflectively, "Yes. Perhaps we can."

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Colorado beetle.* 9, *Tegular.* 10, *Penrith.* 11, *Pict.* 12, *Level.* 14, *Bull.* 16, *Lop.* 18, *Walrus.* 20, *Desert.* 21, *Belated.* 22, *Nausea.* 24, *Wanted.* 27, *Peg.* 29, *Wabe.* 30, *Serai.* 31, *Epic.* 34, *Sea-lion.* 35, *Gamboge.* 36, *Leading-strings.*

Down. 1, *Cat's-paw.* 2, *Logical.* 3, *Role.* 4, *Darnel.* 5, *Bo-peep.* 6, *Edna.* 7, *Leisure.* 8, *Chalet.* 13, *Voyager.* 15, *Cubes.* 17, *Pedal.* 19, *Sea.* 20, *Dew.* 22, *Newest.* 23, *Umbrage.* 25, *Typhoon.* 26, *Duchess.* 27, *Pennon.* 28, *Ganges.* 32, *Wind.* 33, *Omar.*

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ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 143

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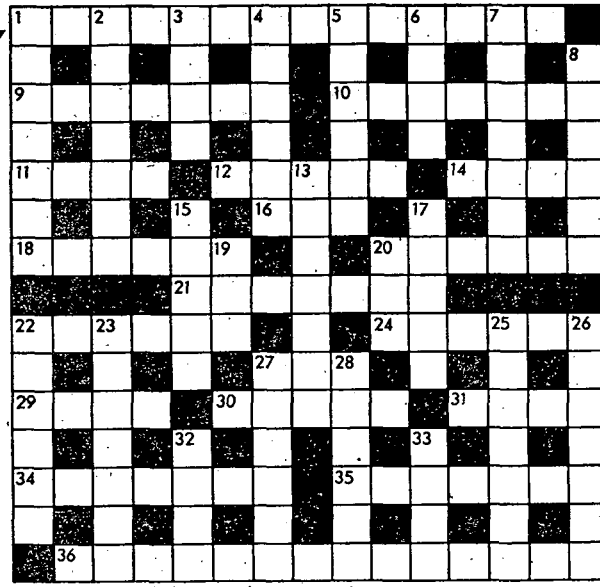

CLUES

Across

1 Pest! He's Spanish coloured (8, 6).
9 Stylish tilish (7).
10 Lakeland town (7).
11 Of old associated with Scot (4).
12 Flat each way (5).
14 Animal with his inner outside (4).
16 Wave movement suiting a cutter (3).
18 Carpenter's mate, as it were? (6).
20 Leave the waste (6).
21 Late in bed (7).
22 Ills of 13 at 19 (6).
24 Pale turnover suspected by cops (6).
27 Little Margaret may be drunk (3).
29 Wherein the slithy toves did gyre (4).
30 There's often a caravan before this (5).
31 In the picnic (4).
34 Does he have a rolling mane? (3-4).
35 Yellow from the East, by gum (7).
36 Instrumental in keeping tiny tots from downfall (7-7).

Down

1 Innocent accomplice, butter wouldn't melt on him (4-3).
2 G.I. in the local (7).
3 It's in petroleum (4).
4 Grass for mending? (6).
5 Shepherdess given to hide-and-seek (2-4).
6 That girl's got the dean all confused (4).
7 It's free this time; no hurry (7).
8 Place for a little talk about the French (6).
13 Now ——, according to Bette (7).
15 They're as broad as they are long anyway (5).
17 Usually works under pressure (5).
19 "—— nymphs hourly ring his knell" (Shakespeare) (3).
20 Wed? No, very much the reverse (3).
22 We're in a nest quite up to date (6).
23 Shady offence? (7).
25 A hard blow (7).
26 She's in the Xanadu chess finals (7).
27 Flag but no iris (6).
28 Holy Indian river (6).
32 Airy motion (4).
33 Confound the poet! Make him roam (4).

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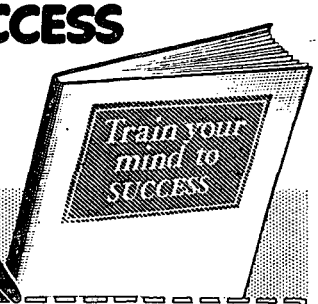

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